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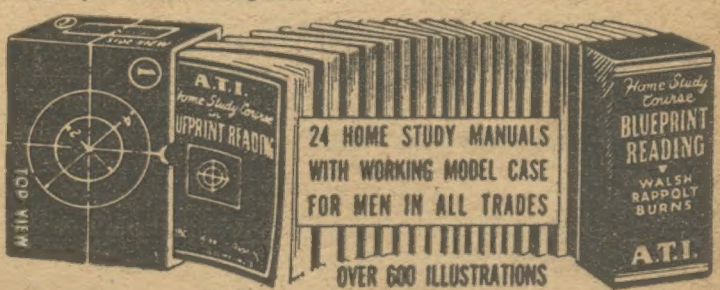

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"If you're not in jail, you should be!" Martha exclaimed angrily.

Kansas Cyclone

Fictionized from the Republic Picture starring

DON "RED" BARRY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Jim Randall	Don Barry
Martha	Lynn Merrick
Sheriff Ed King	William Haade
Cal Chambers	Milt Kibbee
Jud Parker	Harry Worth
Helen King	Dorothy Sebastian
Jim Turner	Jack Kirk
Ben Brown	Forrest Taylor
T-Bone	Charles Moore

CHAPTER I

UNDER A SUN whose hot rays beat down upon the parched earth from a cloudless sky, two Wells-Fargo wagons, heavily laden with ore, wound their way down a narrow road through the mountains.

There were four armed guards. One rode in front, one brought up the rear, and the other two sat alongside the drivers. Recently there had been several successful raids on Wells-Fargo shipments out of Bannock City, and the guards were vigilant and alert.

Hardly had they swung off the main road onto the rough trail leading through a ravine when a lone horseman, silhouetted in the distance against the sky, perceived them and instantly backed down the rise. Out of sight of the wagon-train, he whirled his horse and spurred swiftly among the rocks and trees to where five men sprawled on the ground, their saddled horses nearby.

He shouted, "They're comin', Parker!"

A tall man with black hair and low-lidded dark eyes set under heavy brows, asked curtly, "How many, Chet?"

"Two mounted and two on the wagons!"

Parker nodded and shot a questioning look at two of the other men, Jim Turner and Pete Higgins. They jerked their heads assentingly, and Parker called, "Okay, let's go!"

Led by Chet, they made their way as fast as the rocky terrain permitted, to a point at the top of the ravine, where rocks and trees concealed them. There they halted and drew rifles and revolvers.

Below them they could see the unsuspecting caravan meandering on its way.

"All right, let 'em have it." Parker was issuing a death sentence.

As the fusillade of deadly leaden messengers whined on their lethal errands and the sound of their sending echoed back from the rocky walls of the ravine, the rear guard tumbled off his cayuse. The frightened horses sprang forward, and another volley rang out. The guard of the first wagon sprawled sideways and fell off.

Parker and his men spread out and charged downhill, firing furiously toward the jolting wagons. The two remaining guards returned the fire and the one on horseback spurred back as though to protect the slow-moving vehicles. He paused behind the last wagon and turned to confront the oncoming bandits. But even as he leveled his rifle, a shot struck his head glancingly, and before he could recover, another crashed through his chest, hurling him from his mount.

The careening wagons emerged from the ravine. The one remaining guard fired back coolly, and occasionally the drivers also turned about and cut loose.

Gaining rapidly, the attackers never relaxed their shooting. Turner reined up and aimed carefully at the guard on the second wagon. At the crack of his gun, the guard collapsed and fell forward.

Instantly the driver raised one hand in token of surrender and swung the wagon off the trail. He brought it to a stop.

A moment later, wagon and driver were surrounded. One of the bandits grabbed the lead horses and held them still. Both the driver's hands were raised high.

Parker shouted, "Slim, you and Pete go after the other wagon. I'll see you back at the office."

Two of the robbers galloped away.

"Get off!" Parker's gaze rested on the driver, who was staring at him with astonishment.

The driver climbed down. He muttered incredulously, "Jud Parker—robbin' ore wagons!"

There was cause for his astonishment. Jud Parker was the owner of the Elkhorn, reputed one of the richest mines in the district.

"Can't let this hombre go back and blab," Parker growled in an undertone, glancing meaningly at Turner. "Take him!"

"Right!" said Turner. He dismounted and herded the driver away at the point of his rifle.

One of the bandits climbed into the driver's seat and began turning the wagon about.

A shot sounded. Then Turner came striding back, alone. He mounted his horse, took the reins of the animal whose owner was on the wagon, and the entire party, with the exception of the two who were pursuing the other wagon, started back along the trail.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST ore wagon made frantic efforts to escape the two pursuing robbers, but the running gunfight could, quite obviously, have but one ending. Only now and then was the driver able to turn about and venture a shot.

United States Marshal Jim Randall straightened alertly at the sound of gunfire. Assigned to run down the raiders of Wells-Fargo ore shipments, he had been patrolling this particular section because two of the previous robberies had taken place

in the vicinity. He was pretending to be a geologist, in order to avoid suspicion.

He whirled his mount about and dug star rowels into its flanks. From the top of a scarp, he gazed down and saw the thundering ore wagon and the rapidly gaining pursuers.

The hill was steep and rocky, but the marshal guided his horse down the slope skillfully. Reaching bottom, he headed to intercept the flying wagon, angling across through the brush toward the trail.

He could see the driver crouch, turn about and fire. Pete and Slim were now quite near. Too near to miss. Jim heard the sharp bark of merciless guns. He saw the driver hurled forward by the force of the bullets, as the reins fell from his nerveless fingers.

Randall broke into the trail just behind the wagon and reined up. His first shot, fired coolly and carefully, knocked Slim clean out of the saddle.

Without waiting for more, Pete, the other raider, jerked cruelly on the reins, spun his horse about and spurred frantically away. He flattened down hard, and Randall's bullets flew harmlessly over him.

Galloping alongside the runaway wagon, Jim Randall stood up in his stirrups, sprang and scrambled in beside the dead driver. He picked up the reins and brought the panicky horses to a stop. Wrapping the reins about the brake handle, he bent to examine the driver. Nothing he could do for the poor fellow—that was at once evident.

Randall sprang to the ground, threw back the canvas cover, began examining the sacks of ore. He opened one to see what was inside.

A voice behind him said harshly, "All right, hombre—up with 'em!"

Jim turned about slowly, his hands went up. Two men faced him. They were on foot, their horses were in the bush nearby. In his absorption, they had stolen up on him.

"Who are you and what's the big idea?" he rapped.

"Deputies from Bannock City—and you're under arrest for murder and robbery."

"You blame fools—I'm no robber! I'm a geologist."

"An' I'm Queen of the May!" was the sardonic retort. "Since when have they got geologists high-jackin' ore wagons?"

Paying no heed to Jim's protests, they handcuffed him, and forced him to get into the wagon and drive back toward Bannock City.

"Seems a man's guilty around these parts before he has a chance to explain," grumbled Jim angrily. "What's your names, anyhow?"

"Clem!" The gaunt-faced deputy pointed to himself. "Larry!" He nodded toward his companion.

MEANWHILE Pete had galloped at full speed toward the Elkhorn Mine. This mine, turning out a poor grade of ore and but very little of that, was Jud Parker's blind for his raiding operations.

When Pete reached the mine building which stood close to the shaft, the stolen ore-wagon, with the horses still attached, had been backed up against the door. Two men were removing the ore sacks from the wagon, under Turner's supervision.

They straightened in surprise as Pete raced in. Pete demanded excitedly, "Where's Parker?"

"Inside," replied Turner. "What's the trouble?"

Ignoring the question, Pete dismounted and went into the office.

Turner and the two men followed.

The mine office was untidy and bare. Parker sat at an old table jotting items in a memorandum book, while two other men weighed sacks of ore on an old scale. The work stopped abruptly when Pete and the others entered.

Parker asked crisply, "Get the other wagon?"

"No!" Pete's tone was savage. "Nor I didn't bring Slim back with me, either." As Parker's eyes narrowed, he went on hastily, "A stranger showed up and shot Slim. My gun was empty, so I beat it!"

Parker rose without any particular haste, but his expression was stark and ominous. He came around the table and suddenly his hand shot out, grasping Pete's neckerchief in a strangling hold.

"You chicken-livered fool! There was ten thousand dollars' worth of ore in that wagon!"

Pete cringed and gasped, as Parker reached for his gun.

"That won't help any!" Turner stepped forward and put out a restraining hand. "What happened to the driver, Pete?"

As Parker released him, Pete breathed deeply. He said hoarsely, "We plugged him but I don't know if he cashed in or not."

"If he lived long enough to do any talking"—Parker's glance was grim and ominous—"it'll be just too bad for us." He paced back and forth a moment, then apparently reached a decision. "I'm going into town to check up—see what happened. Take care of the ore and burn that wagon, Turner."

CHAPTER III

THROUGH the main street of Bannock City, Jim Randall, still handcuffed, drove the ore-wagon, his horse fastened to the tail-board, the two deputies riding on each side.

They drew up in front of the Wells-Fargo building, and were almost instantly the center of a group of curious loungers.

One man put his head inside the office and yelled: "Cal—Cal Chambers! Come on out! Here's one of them ore wagons back—looks like there's been another holdup!"

Cal came to the door and inspected the scene sourly. The deputies pushed back the crowd and Jim got off the wagon. Then the three walked over to Chambers, whose hostile glance rested on Jim.

"Another holdup?"

Jim said quietly, "I'd like a few words with you. These gents wouldn't listen to me and——"

"You can talk later," interrupted Cal harshly, "Take him over to the sheriff—I'll be over to the jail in a few minutes."

He turned away. Jim sent an angry glance after him, then turned and stalked off between the two deputies.

When they passed the general store, they saw the sheriff come out, his arms filled with packages. He was followed by a colored man, also heavily laden. They walked toward a buggy at the curb and dumped their packages into it. The storekeeper came running out of the store after them, a box of candy in his hand. He handed it to Sheriff Ed King.

"You forgot the candy for your lady—can't do that, can you?"

King laughed. "Thanks, Tom." His eyes were on the approaching deputies and their prisoner.

The storekeeper said in a friendly tone, "How's Mrs. King feeling?"

"Not too good"—King's features

sobered—"but I'm hoping I can take her out of this climate pretty soon." He handed the box of candy to the Negro as the deputies came up. "Tell Mrs. King I'll be along soon, Snowflake. What's up, Clem?" His gaze rested on jim.

"Ore-wagon bandit!" stated Clem laconically. "Caught him redhanded!"

Jim took a step forward. He said in an undertone, "I can explain all this, Sheriff. Like to talk to you alone."

Without even looking at him, the sheriff led the way toward his office. He said, when they got inside, and after they had told him the story, "Okay, leave him with me, boys. Go cool your throats if you want to."

The two deputies went out. King unlocked Jim's handcuffs, but kept him covered with his gun. Jim rubbed his wrists where the cuffs had bitten. The sheriff watched him narrowly.

"You don't look like a killer!"

"I'm not—nor a robber, either. Two riders were chasing this ore wagon when I came along. I shot one, the other ran away. Driver was dead when I got to the wagon. I was looking into one of the sacks when those deputies showed up....gave me no chance to explain....arrested me and brought me here! I'm a geologist."

King smiled incredulously. "Where you from?"

"Kansas!"

"That's a big .territory. What part?"

"Dodge City."

King fiddled with the trigger of his shooting iron. He said thoughtfully, "I'll check with the Marshal in Dodge City. Have to put you in a cell meanwhile."

"Go to it!" Jim shrugged and grinned. "But you're going to feel awful stupid!"

He rose and preceded the sheriff to the door of one of the cells in the rear. A moment later he had been locked inside.

A woman's voice called from the office, "Ed! Ed!"

"Back here, Martha," replied the sheriff. "Came here to interview this prisoner, I s'pose!" He said to Jim, "This here's my sister, Miss Martha King! She runs the Gazette in this town."

Jim nodded nonchalantly from the bench inside the cell. He saw a brisk, businesslike young woman peering at him through the bars. She held a pad and a pencil. Her eyes were a shining hazel, and her quick, perfunctory smile disclosed a row of even white teeth.

She said, "How do you do! Do you mind if I ask you a few questions for my paper? You're the ore bandit, aren't you?"

Jim grinned. "Don't I look like one?"

"Well...." She appraised him critically. "No, you really don't!"

"Maybe," said Jim blandly, "I'm a new type!"

"My name is Martha King—my brother told you—perhaps you won't mind telling me yours?"

"Jim Randall—Kansas." He smiled cynically as she wrote it down.

"Now, Mr. Randall, just when and why did you embark on a career of crime?"

"Whoa, there!" protested Jim. "I haven't been convicted yet."

"But you did hold up the ore-wagon or you wouldn't be here!"

The sheriff walked away. Jim looked after him, then at the expectant Martha. He murmured, "You talk just like that thick-headed sheriff!"

"He happens to be my brother," snapped Martha.

Jim shook his head sympathetically. "Too bad!"

"It's men of your type who are ruining Bannock City!"

He merely smiled. "I had no idea I was so important."

"You're not," she told him cuttingly. "I'll admit if the ore robberies continue, the miners will be forced to ship from some other town—which of course means our businessmen will suffer!"

Jim nodded bland agreement. As she stared at him, provoked at his indifferent manner, he went on more quietly: "Miss King, I had nothing to do with any robbery or murder except to interfere and fight off the robbers. I'm a—geologist! Nobody seems to believe that."

Evidently the sheriff had been listening. He called ironically, "I suppose you were looking for rock formations in that ore wagon!" He got up, came in and stood by his sister's side. His hostile, contemptuous glance angered Jim.

"He's making a fool out of you," King told his sister. "If you want the real story, get it from Clem or Larry. This is no place for you!"

Martha flashed an irritated look at the prisoner, then went out silently.

"Spunky!" Jim murmured. "I like to see 'em that way!"

CHAPTER IV

HURRYING along the street, muttering to herself and making notes in her book occasionally, Martha almost collided with Cal Chambers.

He chided her humorously. "When folks start talking to themselves, Martha, they're pretty far gone!"

"Well, you can't blame me—it's about the biggest story I've had so far. 'Bandit Leader Captured!'" She was reading from her notes. "'Jim Randall, cold-blooded killer and robber, was captured early today.'"

"Did he confess?"

"No!" Anger flamed in her brown eyes. "He's the most conceited, insolent young man I've ever talked to!"

Chambers chuckled. "You must be interested in him!"

"Of course I am—as a newspaper editor! He's probably guilty of everything he's charged with—and more besides! And he's so brazen—calls himself a geologist!"

Chambers stiffened. "A geologist?"

"Yes. There weren't enough rocks in Kansas so he came out here!"

"Did he say he was from Kansas?" As Martha nodded, looking at him curiously: "What name does he go by?"

"Jim Randall!" She saw the expression on his face: "Is he a well-known gunman? Tell me about him—if you know!"

"I never heard of him," lied Cal Chambers promptly. He had become deeply absorbed, so much so that he even forgot she was there, for he walked away, leaving her looking after him quite miffed.

Cal Chambers went back to his office. He opened the door of the safe and took out a letter. It read:

> "The man we are sending out to investigate the gold ore robberies around Bannock City will say he is a geologist. His name is Jim Randall and his identity must be kept a secret. He will identify himself by the words, 'Kansas School of Mines' and the name 'John Hammond.'
>
> Robert Blakeley,
> General Manager,
> Wells-Fargo Company."

Cal Chambers replaced the letter and hurried out into the street again. Jud Parker rode up, dismounted and stepped onto the sidewalk beside him.

"Just coming to see you, Cal. Heard the Lone Star shipment was held up. Anyone killed?"

Chambers nodded unhappily. "The guards and both drivers. They never had a chance, I guess."

He did not see the glance of satisfaction that flitted across Parker's face.

"Hmm—that's too bad," commented Parker smoothly. "Did they get away with much of Graham's ore?"

"Only one wagon load. A couple of deputies recovered the other wagon and arrested a stranger who was driving it. I'm going down to see him."

"Reckon I'll go along with you," said Parker.

They entered the sheriff's office, and he took them back to Jim Randall's cell.

Cal opened the conversation. "Howdy, young man! I hear you're from Kansas."

Without moving from his seat on the bench, Jim replied: "Any law against that?"

"Nope—just wanted to talk to you about it——"

"You a newspaper editor, too?"

Chambers chuckled. "Not me. I'm the agent for Wells-Fargo in this town—name is Cal Chambers." He chuckled again. "I just met the real editor—what did you say made her so mad?"

"Told her I was a geologist."

Chambers, Parker and the sheriff exchanged amused glances.

"Speaking of geology," continued Cal, "where did you go to school?"

Jim roused and looked sideways at him. "Kansas School of Mines. Why?"

"Oh, just curious. I know a lot of fellows up Kansas way. Whom did you study under?"

"John Hammond."

"Hammond!" Cal's tone held amazement and delight. "Old John Hammond, hey! Baldheaded, with a Vandyke beard—"

"That's him—and glasses so thick he can't see without 'em. Walks with a limp, remember?"

"Do I remember? Say, I was all set to marry his sister!"

On King's face a look of astonishment and perplexity appeared; Parker was listening with narrow-eyed interest.

"Which one?" demanded Jim. "Sylvia or Matilda?"

"Matildy. But she turned me down for a corset salesman!"

"I heard about that. She always claimed she was roped into it."

The other three laughed at his whimsical expression.

Cal said to the sheriff, "This gent is no bandit, Ed. He's on the up-and-up about being a geologist—knows a lot of my friends—and now I remember hearing about him. Jim Randall—sure! I'll vouch for him."

"Well!" The sheriff sighed thoughtfully. "I'll admit there's no real evidence against him—only circumstantial. I'll let him out on your say-so, Cal, only you see he sticks around until after the inquest." He took a large key-ring from a hook on the wall, then stood hesitating, his questioning glance on Parker, who gave no sign.

"You're vouching for him—I'm letting him out on your responsibility," said King to Chambers.

Chambers nodded emphatically.

"That's right—on my responsibility."

The key was turned in the lock and Jim Randall rose from the bench and walked out.

He said briefly, "Much obliged, Mr. Chambers!"

The two men shook hands cordially. Chambers murmured, "Any friend of John Hammond's a friend of mine. And by the way, meet Jud Parker—owns Elkhorn Mine—he's one of our heaviest shippers."

"I'll find out where Clem put your horse," the sheriff offered. He brought out Jim's gun and a few personal belongings the deputies had turned over to him.

When Randall and Chambers went out together, Parker and the sheriff stood watching them reflectively.

CHAPTER V

PARKER MUSED, "Seems funny, a Wells-Fargo man vouching for an hombre that's suspected of robbing Wells-Fargo shipments!"

King frowned. "Just what do you mean?"

"I mean I don't like that bird being let out. How do we know he's what he claims to be?"

King sat down heavily behind his desk; he seemed worried. "I'm sorry I ever got mixed up in this," he growled bitterly.

"Kind of late to be sorry, ain't it?" sneered Parker. "You wanted money and you got plenty of it. There's a lot more for you so long as there ain't a slip-up."

"I know—I know." The sheriff groaned, shook his head despairingly. "I've got to get enough to take Helen out of here where she'll get well. That's all I care about now."

"Sure, sure." Parker spoke soothingly, watching the lawman with keen, sardonic eyes.

Abruptly King smote the desk with a clenched fist, and there was violence in his manner. "But I won't have any more gunplay, hear me! Stealing ore is one thing—but killing is another. You've got to tell your boys to cut that out. That was our understanding."

Parkers' reply was sententious. "Dead men can't talk!"

"I don't like it, I tell you. And dead men cause a lot of talk from live ones."

"Okay, okay—I'll tell 'em to shoot high next time."

Parker moved toward the door. Over his shoulder he said with hypocritical submissiveness, "You're the boss!" He added, "But I'll keep an eye on Randall—just for luck! I don't cotton to that hombre!"

IN THE Nugget Saloon there were only a few patrons at that hour. Among them were some of Parker's henchmen, including Pete and a stubby man named Shorty. They were grouped at one end of the bar. At the other end stood Cal Chambers and Jim Randall.

"I'll bet," Cal was saying with a grin, "if John Hammond could've heard us describing him, he'd go gunning for us."

Jim smiled appreciatively. "Wouldn't blame him. What *does* he look like, anyway?"

"Search me. I never heard of him till I got the letter from Blakeley." Both men laughed. "That was good about Sylvy and Matildy. As a liar, you get first prize, Randall!"

"You run me a close second," stated Jim generously.

From the doorway Parker stared

at them suspiciously. He walked over and stood beside the Wells-Fargo manager.

"Didn't take you long to get thick with this jail bird," he murmured to Chambers.

Chambers turned on him. "I choose my own friends," he said calmly. Under his resentful stare, Parker's wavered.

Jim looked at Chambers questioningly. Chambers said shortly, "He's finding fault because I'm friendly with a jail-bird!"

"All right then, I am!" Parker glared truculently at Jim. "I think you'd better head outta town, Randall—before someone runs you out!"

"I'll wait till that happens!" Jim's grey eyes became chilly.

His calmness infuriated Parker.

Cal Chambers, now thoroughly angry, rasped out: "See here, Parker, who gave you the right—"

Abruptly Parker's arm pushed violently against Cal's chest, hurling him against a table. As he staggered back, Jim sprang at Parker, swinging. Parker ducked and backed away. From the other end of the bar, his men rushed into the fight.

Jim yelled joyfully, "Here we go, Cal!"

He put his back against the bar, and measured Pete and Shorty, circling in front of him. Swift as a striking rattler, his fist flashed out. It didn't seem like a hard blow, but under its impact Pete went down like a stricken ox. Jim's head moved smoothly forward, avoiding Shorty's swing; with the same motion he struck, a clean, scientific crack that disposed of Shorty as decisively as he had of Pete.

Cal bent and started pulling the half-conscious men out of the way.

"Thanks, Cal!" shouted Jim, the grin still on his face. "Get this one!" It was a short, jolting uppercut, and it sent the third man hurtling straight into Cal's arms.

Gently Cal laid him down beside the others.

Parker had been watching, an uncertain look on his face. He turned and started hastily to leave.

"Oh, no, you don't!" Jim leaped after him, grasped him by the shoulder and whirled him about.

Parker struggled free and lashed out, but Jim wasn't there. Jim measured his man deliberately, then let him have it. He dusted his hands and looked down at the beaten attackers like one who has accomplished a disagreeable task in a satisfactory manner.

"Come on over to the office," Cal suggested. "We can't talk here—too many butting in." He murmured, as they walked out, "What's in those fists of yours, lead? Never saw anything like that before!"

In Cal's office, with the door closed, Jim lit a cigarette and tilted back in his chair, while Cal paced back and forth.

"How many mines are there around Bannock City that make regular shipments of ore?" asked Randall.

"Five!" Cal's brows knitted. "I can't figure out what those bandits do with the ore they steal. It ain't worth anything to them unless it can be milled."

Randall blew a cloud of smoke. "Maybe it is being milled."

"The Wells-Fargo Company," objected Chambers, "has contracts with every mine to haul their ore. There's no record of any other shipments being delivered."

Jim shook his head doggedly. "Just the same the stolen ore is being shipped by somebody, Cal."

There came the sound of heavy

footsteps in the outer office and a knock on the door. Chambers called, "Come in," and the sheriff appeared.

He said genially, "Your horse is outside, Randall."

Jim said, "Thanks," and rose. He paused as the sheriff remained standing in his way.

"Figuring to do a little prospecting while you're here?"

"Maybe!" Jim's tone was good-natured, his expression deadpan.

King nodded, turned on his heel and walked out. Chambers winked at Randall; a minute later he and Jim followed.

When they reached the street in front of the office, they saw Martha King. She was showing the sheriff a front-page proof; she turned the sheet so that Cal could see it.

"Take a look at these headlines! We certainly gave it to that smart-aleck jailbird! This should—" She stopped abruptly as her eyes fell on Jim. Her amazement and incredulity were almost ludicrous. She demanded, "How did you get out?" and looked at her brother.

"Chewed my way right through a couple of bars, ma'am," Jim told her solemnly. He reached for the sheet. "Mind if I see it?" He smiled quizzically as he read:

"BANNOCK CITY GAZETTE, Martha King, Editor and Publisher. BANDIT KILLER JAILED! RUTHLESS KILLER CAPTURED BY SHERIFF'S MEN AFTER DESPERATE GUN BATLE!"

He returned the sheet politely. "Take it away, ma'am," he begged. "If I read any more, I'm going to be plumb scared of myself!"

The sheriff chuckled and Chambers grinned.

Martha exclaimed angrily, "If you're not in jail, you should be. You're the rudest, freshest. . ."

"Ah—but you ought to see my table manners—they make up for all my other faults!"

Martha sputtered, "You—you callous—criminal!"

"Now, now, honey!" Her brother put a hand on her arm. "Seems we were mistaken about Mr. Randall."

"I'll never believe it!" She glared at Jim.

"Thanks for the apology!" Jim's eyes rested on her without resentment; there was even a light of admiration in them. He strode toward his horse. Over his shoulder he called, "I meant what I said about my table manners—try me some time." He mounted, waved at the group, and galloped off.

"He's—he's impossible. . . ." But there was no conviction in her voice, and her gaze followed the graceful figure in the saddle.

The two men exchanged smiles.

Cal said teasingly, "You got to admit he's interesting, Martha!"

"I do not—I—" She caught Cal's amused expression and abruptly her features melted into an unwilling smile. "I wonder if he really has such good table manners!" She laughed outright, then walked off in the direction of her office.

"Got me puzzled, that young feller," remarked King.

Cal rubbed his chin, then his cheek. He said, "Can't see why—I told you he's all right."

"That's right, you told me." Gloom and doubt were thickly spread over the sheriff's face. "Hope you know what you're talking about."

"He's no bandit, Ed." A glint of sudden alertness came into Cal's orbs. "If that's what you're worrying about!"

King sensed something in the other's tone. He said quickly, "Sure, that's what I *am* worrying about... don't like Martha's being so interested in him, either. She's my sister—I got to take care of her."

With a quick gesture he strode away, and the Wells-Fargo man looked after him thoughtfully.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS DUSK and the flames in the Western sky had faded and merged into the dark blue around, when Randall reached the ravine where the holdup of the ore wagons had taken place.

He dismounted, and his well-trained sorrel followed him like a dog as he examined the ground, tracking to the point where the attackers had cut in. His practiced eye lifted to the high spot from which the raiders had swooped down, and he saw a horseman coming toward him.

When a rider hits through brush at such an hour, instead of keeping to the trail, there is cause to be suspicious, Randall decided. Quietly he grasped the sorrel's bridle and melted into the brush. Under a tree close to the trail he stood up in the saddle, grabbed a sturdy branch and swung up.

He said urgently, "Get along, Bunny," and the intelligent animal minced off a few feet.

The horse and rider lit into the trail below Jim and were dim shapes in the gloom of the ravine. They came along slowly, and Jim saw the rider draw his gun. Something wrong here, something that needed clearing up, Jim reflected.

Now the rider was almost directly under the tree. Jim dropped lightly to the horse's rump behind him. The man let out a startled yelp; a moment later Jim had bulldogged him to the ground. As he struck the earth, the stranger let go of the gun. Jim grabbed it and rose to his feet.

The stranger sat up and stared at him. Jim whistled. Sheriff King!

He said, "Didn't know it was you, Sheriff—seemed to me you were acting kind of suspicious...."

"Give me my shooting-iron!" As Jim handed it to him he gritted angrily, "What are you snooping around here for?"

"Just trying to pick up a few ore samples," Jim stated innocently.

The sheriff got up and dusted himself. His gaze bored into Jim's face. "Find anything good?"

"No, not yet—you scared me off too soon. Getting dark, too. I'll have to try again."

"Geologist you said you were, didn't you? I'm right curious to find out if you really are. We'll take a little trip to the Lone Star Mine."

Jim shrugged. He said briefly, "Suits me!"

It was not a long ride, although they had to pick their way until they emerged from the ravine. They came to the Lone Star mine building. Yellow light shone from the window, and the sign was visible: "Lone Star Mine, Lon Graham, Manager."

"Keeps late hours, doesn't he?" Jim remarked.

King nodded. "Lon's a hard worker."

They went inside and Randall saw a strong-faced, honest-looking man of middle age seated at an oak table on which were piles of ore samples and papers on spindles. He rose and shook hands with King.

"Got any news of my lost ore wagon?" he asked.

"Not yet," said King regretfully, "but we're working on it."

Graham grumbled, "I can't afford many more of these robberies. Wells-Fargo are going to quit guaranteeing my shipments." He glanced at Jim.

"Meet Jim Randall," said the sheriff, and the two men shook hands. "Randall claims he's a geologist," King went on. "I'd like to make sure."

"Maybe I ought to send for my diploma from the Kansas School of Mines," Jim suggested.

Graham picked an ore sample from the table and handed it to him. "What do you make of this?"

"Analyzing ore," stated Jim cautiously, "is more in the line of mineralogy than geology."

The sheriff eyed him ominously. "Meaning you can't tell us about this chunk of quartz?"

"I could if I had my hammer and magnifying glass."

Without a word, Graham opened a drawer and brought out a hammer and a magnifying glass. Jim took them, split the ore and put the glass to his eye.

He said, "This is a fine specimen of good free milling quartz—rich in gold content. I'd say it came from about a four hundred foot level and the vein should run in a northeasterly direction. Traces of azurite and chalco-pyrite through it...."

He almost burst out laughing when he looked up and caught the sheriff's surprised and disappointed expression. He turned to Graham.

"You've got exceptionally rich ore, Graham, if this is a sample of it. Should run about sixty-five hundred to the ton."

Graham exclaimed admiringly, "That's a darn good guess. It assays a trifle over sixty-eight hundred. You're good. Any time you want a job, come around to me."

On their way back, the sheriff, who now appeared thoroughly satisfied, offered his apologies.

"Say," invited the lawman, "why don't you come out to the house with me and show us those table manners you're so proud of?"

Jim said promptly, "I'd like nothing better."

"Won't be any rocks to break up, but there'll be hot biscuits."

"Hope I'll know the difference," grinned Jim. "Pretty late—think they're holding dinner for you?"

The sheriff reassured him. He added, "Get Cal Chambers and bring him along—that'll give 'em a chance to get ready for you."

CHAPTER VII

RANDALL and Chambers, cleaned up and appropriately dressed, dismounted and tied their horses to the hitch-rack. They heard the sound of a good organ inside the white and green cottage, and the light that shone through the curtained windows was dim and cool.

"Sounds like a new organ," Jim commented.

Chambers pulled at his high choker collar. "It is. Ed sees that Helen gets the best there is—of everything." He noticed Jim's thoughtful and puzzled look and added: "Fine couple—salt of the earth!"

Jim grinned. "I'd say Martha's a bit salty, too, wouldn't you—in her sweet way!"

They stepped to the porch and glanced in at the window. Jim said in an undertone, "Say, Cal, just look

at that silver—and the china—and *carpet!*"

The room was lavishly furnished. . lacy curtains at the windows, portieres between the living-room and the study beyond it, heavy brocaded furniture of the period and, in the center of the room, a beautifully-set table in front of which Snowflake's moving black bulk contrasted with the snow-white tablecloth. At the other end of the room stood a huge, obviously expensive manual-organ. A frail, beautiful woman was playing it.

"That's Helen—Ed King's wife," Chambers whispered. "Watch him look at her—like he could kiss the ground she walks on."

Then Martha came out of the study and pirouetted about, showing off her new dress.

"And that's because you're coming," said Cal, nudging Jim. "Let's go in!"

"Wait a minute!" Jim stepped back and pulled Chambers with him. "Sheriff's pay is somewheres around fifty a month, isn't it? How does he do it on that?"

Chambers stood as though petrified. His features tightened, and he nodded slowly.

"I hope I'm wrong," Jim said grimly.

They went inside and the hearty greeting made Randall feel ashamed of his suspicions—without dispelling them. At the meal Helen presided with Jim on one side of her and Cal on the other. Beside Jim sat Martha, and they were both getting a lot of amusement watching Cal Chambers try to eat without his collar cutting his throat. The sheriff sat at the other end of the table, opposite his wife, and Snowflake did the serving.

It was after dessert had been put in front of them that Jim, until now absorbed in Martha, heard the tail end of Helen's remark: ". . . .so we'll be starting East very soon—Ed and I."

Jim said quietly, "I hope you have a wonderful trip, Mrs. King."

"Trip?" Martha laughed gaily. "They're not coming back. Didn't you say you might even take a sea voyage to England, Ed?"

King threw a quick glance at Jim, and red tinged his cheeks. "All talk so far, Martha!" he grunted. He looked uncomfortable.

"Oh, Ed"—Helen's tears were very near the surface—"you promised!" Her husband rose and came around the table to her. He patted her shoulder, bent down and kissed her, and whispered in her ear. Her arms twined about his neck and she pleaded, half-hysterically: "I hate this place! Please take me away! It's killing me—I never want to see it again!"

Alarmed, Martha also rose and went to her side.

The sheriff murmured soothingly, "We're going, all right, honey, and we're not coming back, either. Just give me a little more time to straighten things out."

Martha led Helen away from the table and the sheriff returned to his seat. He glanced at his guests and saw silent sympathy in their faces.

He said heavily, "When they're sick, a man's got to do what he can!"

"Sure—and you do," agreed Cal gruffly, and Jim added, "Sure," with a thoughtful, unhappy light far back in his grey eyes.

THERE was a loud knock on the door. Before anyone could answer, it opened and Parker swag-

gered in. His scowling gaze rested on Jim Randall.

He said, "Hi, Sheriff! Didn't know you were having company!"

Jim nodded slightly. The sheriff called, "Sit down—glad you came!"

"Little pertickler about the company I keep," stated Parker meaningly. He looked flushed, as though he had had just enough liquor to make him quarrelsome.

"All in here are guests of mine," warned King. "Snowflake, pour another cup!"

Martha came through the door into the room, her face serious. She closed it softly behind her, then saw Parker. Her face shadowed—quite evidently she didn't like the man, and her greeting was formal as she moved toward the table. Jim rose and pulled her chair back, while Parker deposited himself in Helen's vacant seat. The stiffness of Martha's greeting seemed to enrage him still more.

"It's nice to meet a man who really does have table manners," smiled Martha, looking up at Randall.

Parker glared at her. "Gettin' too stuck up to talk to people?"

"I said 'Good evening'," replied Martha coldly. She turned to Jim. "I've made up my mind to get a four-star interview with you. Shall we start now?"

Parker rose suddenly, his hand on the gun in his belt. He snarled, "I'll ask the questions!"

"Jud, what's the matter with you?" remonstrated the sheriff.

Jim stirred, and put down his napkin, while Martha stared indignantly at the congested face of the unwelcome guest. Jim rose slowly and faced Parker.

He said, "I'm answering no questions of yours, Mister!"

They stood thus, almost touching each other, then Parker's hand dropped from his gun. The sheriff was on his feet now, too, and put a hand on Parker's arm. Parker jerked it off impatiently, went to his seat and plumped into it.

The hot coffee spilled into his lap and he swore aloud and sprang up again. This time he permitted the sheriff to lead him out. He appeared again some time later to say goodnight in a surly voice.

Jim said to King, "I'm sorry this happened!"

"I'm not," snapped Martha, and the sheriff added, "You don't need to apologize, Jim—he had it coming to him."

On their way home late that night, Jim asked Cal Chambers: "How long has Jud Parker been running the Elkhorn?"

"Reopened it a year ago—ships quite a lot of good ore."

"Wells-Fargo does his hauling?"

"Uh-huh. Got contracts with all the mines."

"Is your guarantee of safe delivery based on the assayed value?"

"Yeah—and these holdups have been costing us plenty."

"I suppose," Jim persisted, "you keep a complete record of all shipments, and their assayed values?"

"Sure. Delivery slips are all in my office safe."

"I'd like to look at them, Cal."

Late as it was, they went to the Wells-Fargo office and Chambers brought out the slips. There were four on which Jim at first concentrated, records of ore deliveries from the Bannock Milling and Smelting Corporation.

Cal called his attention to slips from the five mines, and then half a dozen more. Jim studied them with mounting excitement.

He said softly, "Wow—I think we've hit it! Look at the figures on the Elkhorn ore! $6833 a ton on this one's assay—this one's only $3200—here's one that's $2380. And all from the same mine! Doesn't it strike you as queer the way it varies—ore from one mine varying like that?"

"I'll say it's queer! Don't know why it didn't strike us before." Cal stared at him, his mouth a straight line. "Same mine don't turn out poor ore one day and rich ore the next."

"Right! Which means that the Elkhorn ore comes from a lot of different mines!"

"And that Parker is stealing it from the other mines and shipping it from his." Then his face fell. "But say, the Elkhorn has had as many robberies as the others."

"Of course it has!" Jim's lips twisted cynically. "And you've paid off on them, haven't you? Parker steals them, gets his insurance, then ships them again later. What a racket!"

There was silence then. Cal broke it by asking, "May be all true, Jim, but how're you going to prove it?"

"I dunno—yet. But first thing tomorrow morning I'm going to the Elkhorn to get a sample of their ore—if I can."

CHAPTER VIII

FROM BEHIND a rock on the crest of a low hill overlooking the Elkhorn Mine, Jim looked down upon a scene of bustle and activity that certainly seemed genuine. Men were busy at the entrance to the shaft, tram cars were coming out and being dumped, sacks were being filled with ore. Jim worked his way down the hill and got close enough to read "Elkhorn Mine" on some of the sacks. Cautiously he catfooted down still further, coming finally to the rear of the mine building.

Through an open window he heard the sheriff's voice say clearly, "Tell the boys to finish filling those ore sacks and pile them up in the storage tunnel."

Amazed at the note of command, Jim edged closer and peered through the window. He saw the sheriff and Parker sitting at the desk; Turner was just walking out.

Jim waited while Turner crossed and disappeared inside the mine tunnel. Then he himself zigzagged silently across the clearing, through rocks and trees, until finally he got to the bottom of an ore dump. He started climbing upward and at last reached a point from which he could see the men coming out of the main tunnel. Waiting his chance, he swung down to the track runway and, grabbing a candle from the wall, ducked inside.

He picked his way carefully, holding the lighted candle above his head. What he saw confirmed his suspicions. Debris and rocks lay over the narrow track, and when he came to the huge timber door opening on the mine itself, he saw a large cobweb hanging in front of it.

No one had gone through that door in quite some time!

A voice yelled, "Hey, who's in there?"

Instantly Jim blew out the candle, and flattened back into a crevice in the wall.

A figure came toward him—Jim heard the crunch of leather on loose stones. In a brief space of time the man was near enough for Jim to rec-

"Martha's a blonde, and blondes always get their man!"

ognize him—Pete! His gun was in his hand.

Jim sprang on the fellow's back and tried to wrest his gun away. Pete yelled and dragged Jim toward the mouth of the tunnel. The gun went off, its roar magnified by the narrow chamber.

A hard right to the jaw put Pete out of the fight for the time being, and Randall raced out of the tunnel. Turner and some of the others outside fired but missed him. Parker and the sheriff came out of the building shouting questions.

Racing recklessly down the embankment, Jim reached his horse, mounted and spurred away.

Back at the mine house Parker asked, "Who was it, Turner?"

"I don't know but I'm sure gonna find out," grated Turner savagely.

Pete came back from chasing Jim. He volunteered, "It was Randall!"

"Randall, hey! Get your horses and go after him!" ordered Parker.

The sheriff interposed, "Wait a minute! Randall's a geologist—there's no law against him looking over the mines in this country. There'll be no more killings, Parker. I'll take care of him."

Parker stared at him blackly. "See that you do. If anything goes wrong, law or no law, I'll take matters into my own hands! Back to work, you fellers!"

Coming out of the Assay Office with the ore he had picked up in the

Elkhorn Mine, Jim came face to face with Martha.

She said at once, "I'm sorry for the way Jud Parker acted last night."

Jim smiled easily. "Oh, that's all right—I've forgotten all about it. I suppose your brother has known him a long time."

"Several years. They used to be mining partners in Montana."

Carefully casual, Jim asked, "Has Ed an interest in the Elkhorn?"

"Oh no—he just spends a lot of time there."

They walked along together until they came opposite the Wells-Fargo office.

"I've got to go in here," said Jim reluctantly. "See you later."

Cal Chambers was inside the door—he had been watching Jim and Martha. He said, "I'm a-warning you, Jim—Martha's a blonde, and blondes always get their man!"

"So what?" The prospect didn't alarm Jim. He drew a sample of ore and a piece of paper from his pocket. "Got this at the Elkhorn—and here's the assay report."

Chambers took the ore and the paper, and read the latter with increasing amazement. "Why, according to this report, the ore ain't worth $20.00 a ton!"

"Mm! Tell you something else: There's no real work going on at the mine. The whole setup's a fake!" He added regretfully, "And the sheriff's in it up to his neck! I saw him out there giving orders!"

"That's too bad," Cal muttered sadly. "Gonna be tough on that sick wife of his—and Martha."

Jim nodded sternly. "Well....I'm going out to get Lon Graham to let me bring in a load of his high-grade to the mill."

"You will? Dunno whether he'll take a chance. Lon's near broke now—after yesterday. They'd get it sure."

"That's what I'm hoping," said Jim.

"What's the play?"

"Tell you later. I'll need your help if I can persuade him."

CHAPTER IX

PARKER and Ed King rode into Bannock City together. They passed Jim Randall, and the sheriff waved at him, but Parker's jaw set and he looked straight ahead.

Outside the Gazette office, King dismounted. Standing at the window, Martha saw them. Parker was scowling and complaining about something; the sheriff looked determined and replied sharply. When Parker put spurs to his horse and rode off, the sheriff stood looking after him a moment. Then he came into the office.

Martha asked lightly, "Any news, Sheriff? Catch any bandits?"

"Not yet." King grimaced soberly and brought out his tobacco pouch.

"Ed," she asked abruptly, "do you own an interest in Elkhorn?"

Startled, he spilled some of the tobacco. He said, "Of course not! What ever put that idea into your head?"

"Oh, different things!" She gazed at him doubtfully and shrugged. "You and Jud spend so much time together—even Jim remarked it."

With a steady hand the sheriff tamped tobacco into his pipe. "How come Jim was discussing it?"

"Well, he'd just had a piece of ore assayed, so we naturally got to talking about mines and mining."

"Was the ore good?"

"He didn't say."

"I want," said the sheriff, going to the door, "to talk to Jim Randall about a job."

Martha's pleasure lit up her face. "Wish him luck for me, Ed."

His glance was keen and curious. "Kind of go for him, don't you?"

"You bet I do."

Near the stable, King saw Jim on horseback and hailed him. "If you've got a minute, Randall...."

Jim smiled at him. "Am I arrested again?"

"Well, I've got a complaint against you"—King came close to him—"but I thought I'd get your side of the story. What *did* happen out at the Elkhorn this morning?"

Jim laughed sheepishly. "I happened to be riding past the mine, and being interested in geology, I wandered into the main tunnel for a look."

"Find what you were after?"

"Didn't get the chance." Jim stroked the sorrel's mane. "One of the guards jumped me and I left in a hurry."

The sheriff chided gently, "You should have hunted up Parker before you went into the shaft. Jim, I've a friend who can use a good geologist—up in Blair County. He'd want you to start right away."

"Why, thanks, Ed, that's right kind of you. But Lon Graham threatened to put me on his payroll yesterday. Remember?"

"Oh," said the sheriff in a relieved tone, "that's fine! Lon's a great fellow!"

Jim went to see Lon Graham and tried to sell him the idea of letting him bring some of his ore to the mill. He did not find Graham in a receptive mood.

"I'll guarantee you won't lose that ore," Jim told him forcefully.

But Graham shook his head. "Can't take the chance!"

"Look—it's not even a gamble," Jim assured him earnestly. He had told him all about Parker and the fake setup at the Elkhorn. "I'll let them grab the ore and we'll watch for Parker's next shipment. You'll find your ore packed in Elkhorn sacks. His ore is low-grade—worth about $20.00 a ton—yours is worth seven thousand. We'll seize his shipment and make him show what part of his mine it comes from. That'll lick him!"

Graham finally gave in.

IN THE sheriff's office, King read the handbill on top of a pile, offering $5,000 reward for the capture, dead or alive, of unidentified bandits. Sitting opposite him, Parker watched the lawman sardonically.

King asked in a low voice, "When are you bringing that Lone Star ore in to the mill?"

"Tomorrow or the day after. Why?"

"Because," stated King crisply, "after that we get squared up and I'm through."

"Figure you'll have enough, hey?"

"Whether I have or not, I'm quitting."

They heard Cal's voice in the living-room. "Hello, folks, do I smell chocolate cake? I'd 'a' brought Jim, only he's working at his new job with Lon Graham." He lowered his voice, but the two men could hear him clearly. "Lon's opened up a new vein of high-grade and Jim's to bring in the first load to the mill—wants to be around when the tests are made."

Guessing Parker's thoughts, King whispered, "They'll have eight guards—forget it!"

Martha spoke up worriedly. "I

hope the bandits don't hear about it."

"Not a chance," was Cal's reply. "Ain't even putting guards on the wagon for fear one of *them* might talk."

"That," muttered Parker grimly, "is what you call having it fall right into your lap."

He and King argued over it. Finally King was persuaded, upon Parker's solemn promise that he would order his men to shoot over Randall's head.

CHAPTER X

WITH JIM driving, the horses pulled the ore wagon along the trail which wound through the jagged rocks and thin timber and brush. He glanced warily about him, knowing the attack he expected was about due.

He was not disappointed. The crackling discharge of guns sounded, and four men charged down the hill.

Crouching low, Jim discharged his revolver as he urged the horses to greater speed.

Reaching the trail behind the wagon, the four attackers raced after it. Jim fired one shot at them, then, still holding on to the reins, he climbed down from the wagon seat to the double trees, edged out on the tongue, and bending down, tried to pull out the king pin connecting the wagon with the tongue.

The bullets kept whining past him, and the pin did not give way. He balanced hazardously on the tongue, put all his strength into a mighty heave, and out it came. Jim still held on to the reins.

As the tongue came out and fell to the ground between the four horses, Jim edged still further along and managed to climb onto the back of one of the wheel animals. He had not let go of the reins, and now he concentrated his efforts on urging the horses to greater speed.

They drew away from the wagon, which careened off the road and came to a stop against the embankment.

Riding the wheel horse with easy balance, Jim glanced back at the oncoming bandits, then leaned forward and began unfastening the harness and the hames on the animals' collars. He released the hames, and the harness slid off, permitting Jim's horse to run free.

Jim's animal was now harnessed only with collar and bridle. He swung it away from the other three, which kept on wildly down the road. There was a steep embankment to the right of him, and down it Jim rode recklessly, disregarding brush and boulders.

The pursuers reined up alongside the laden ore wagon, and fired a few shots after Jim. Then Turner called, "Let him go—we've got the gold. Hurry up—fasten your ropes on the wagon—let's go!"

Bringing the wagon of ore back to the Elkhorn, they found Parker and the sheriff waiting.

"Easiest job I ever tackled," bragged Turner. "This Randall ain't got no guts—fired a coupla wild shots and scooted! Rode off without even lookin' behind him."

Parker strode over to the wagon and picked up a piece of ore. "It's high-grade, all right." His eyes narrowed meditatively. "Too easy, too easy! Wait a minute—I think I've got the idea. Randall's been working with Cal Chambers—they'll be waiting for this ore at the mill." He

grinned at King's dismayed expression. "We'll outsmart them. Unload that wagon!"

Within an hour, Parker rode into Bannock City and dismounted in front of the Stamp Mill. He told Brown, the mill superintendent, that he had a load coming in, then sat down on a barrel to wait.

From the porch of the Wells-Fargo office, Jim saw him. He called over his shoulder, "Parker is waiting outside the mill. That wagon must be coming!"

Behind him were Graham and Cal Chambers. "Hope I get my ore back," muttered Graham worriedly.

"Let's go," said Jim, and he and Graham started toward the mill.

Behind the swinging door of the saloon across the street from the Wells-Fargo office, Turner had been watching. Now he came out, looked about him quickly, and slipped across the street. He disappeared into Chambers' office.

Brown called to Graham, "Hi'ya, Lon! I was just tellin' Jud about your hard luck." His glance fell on Jim and he scowled. "Ain't you the gent was in jail for tryin' to rob Lon's other load?"

Jim merely smiled.

"He was driving the load that just got knocked off, too," commented Parker. "You sure have a trusting nature, Lon."

There came the rumble of wheels up the street, and a few minutes later Parker's ore wagon pulled up beside the mill, and two armed guards sprang off.

Parker called, "Unload her, boys."

"Wait a minute!" Jim stepped toward the wagon. "We'd like to take a look at that ore." Both Parker and Brown voiced harsh objections, but Jim insisted. "I'm going to prove that this is Lon Graham's ore. I want an assay on it right away."

HE SLASHED a bag open, took out two chunks of ore, and was about to hand them to Brown. Then he took another look and paused, startled and dismayed. Graham came over and grabbed one of the pieces of ore from his hands.

He growled suspiciously, "This ain't my ore. What kinda trick is this?"

"I—" Jim was completely flabbergasted. "This is a low grade."

Parker sat there and laughed. "I don't claim it's anything else. It's my hard luck if my mine is running low-grade."

"You double-crossed me, Randall." Graham turned on him furiously. "You stole my ore and tried to hang it on Parker."

Parker rose and strode over, and Jim whirled on him. He snapped, "You've got Graham's ore, you damned thief!"

"You're a liar, Randall!"

Jim struck him hard and Parker crashed back against the machinery. He drew his gun as he recovered, and snapped a wild shot at Jim, who jumped behind another piece of machinery. Brown yelled and leaped for cover, while Parker fired again at Randall. Jim saw Parker aim at Graham.

"Look out, Lon!" he yelled.

A shot sounded and Graham slumped down. Men came running down the street toward them. Both Jim and Parker emerged from behind cover.

"You shot him in the back!" Jim accused crisply.

"Don't try to put it on me," yipped Parker. "You did it."

Brown shook his fist at Jim. "I

was here—I seen it all. We got you dead to rights."

An ominous muttering came from the crowd which had gathered. They surged toward Randall, urged on by Parker and Brown. Jim slugged at them, but they closed about him.

The sheriff and one of his deputies, Clem, shouldered their way through as Jim flattened one of his assailants. Reaching Jim's side, the sheriff shouted, "Get back there, all of you!"

Parker crowded in. He bellowed, "Randall shot Lon Graham!"

The sheriff looked bewildered. "I thought you were working for him," he said to Jim.

"I was," rapped Jim angrily. "Parker killed him—I saw it!"

"Oh no, you didn't!" Brown pushed through toward them. "Randall robbed Lon—I heard them arguin' —then Randall started shootin'!"

Clem took Jim's gun away from him.

In the crowd, some of Parker's henchmen were skillfully inciting violence. "String him up!" "He's a murderer!" "Grab him!" "Get a rope!"

In front of the prisoner the sheriff waved his gun threateningly. But the crowd would not be balked. They rushed and shoved him aside. A dozen hands grabbed at Jim.

He shouted, "Wait a minute! I'm a United States Marshal, working for Wells-Fargo!"

That astonishing statement made the crowd pause. Parker cast a quick glance at the sheriff, who stiffened and turned pale.

"Where's your identification?" demanded King.

Jim looked straight at him. "Get Cal Chambers here; he'll identify me."

In the moment of uncertainty that followed, with both the sheriff and the crowd undecided, Parker took command.

He said loudly, "We'll see about that. Bring him along."

Something about Parker's assured air, the light of triumph in his eyes, made Jim uneasy.

He understood only too well when they entered the Wells-Fargo office and found Cal sitting at his desk with a knife in his back.

Parker said brutally, "More of your work, Randall," and at that Jim lashed out, reckless of consequences, staggering Parker with a blow to the jaw. He paused when King covered him with his gun.

Right then and there he made his accusation. He leveled an accusing finger straight at the sheriff.

"You're one of the ore bandits," he said clearly. "You and Parker are responsible for the murder of Cal Chambers—and the reason is that you knew he was working with me to clear up these ore robberies!"

Brown stared in amazement. He mumbled, "The sheriff—and Parker —ore bandits!"

"He's a trapped rat," snarled Parker, holding his jaw. "What else do you expect him to say?"

The crowd outside had become more and more threatening. Men tried to push their way into the office; Clem stood at the door fighting to keep them out. Finally he managed to lock it. The word reached the mob that Randall had killed Cal Chambers. A rock crashed through the window; the hoarse and shrill shouts became louder and fiercer.

With his hands tied behind him, Jim had been shoved into a chair in one corner of the office.

"Can't we get him to jail?" demanded Brown.

The sheriff shook his head gloomily. "He's safer here."

Jim heard him. He laughed bitterly. "You mean you're safer—if I get out, I'll tell them the truth."

"Gag him," snapped Parker angrily. "We've heard enough from him." After that had been done he took the sheriff aside. "You get out to the mine and burn those Lone Star sacks. I'll handle this!"

King stared at him aghast. "You mean you'll hand him over to the crowd?"

"I mean I've listened to your stalling long enough. Now I'm doing it my way. If they don't hang him, we're liable to stretch ropes ourselves. Take your choice."

That clinched it. King gave up and strode out, leaving Jim at Parker's mercy. Brown and Clem lifted Cal's body and carried it out through the rear door. In a little while Brown returned, obviously worried, wiping the moisture from his forehead.

"Maybe," he suggested, "we can get Randall out that way, too."

Another rock crashed through into the room; the yelling took on a higher and more ominous note. It wouldn't be long before they'd override all opposition and crash in.

"Look here," said Brown, "I don't like this...."

Parker snapped, "Shut up!"

Something in his manner and appearance struck Brown unfavorably. He backed away. This was Parker uncamouflaged.

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS from Snowflake that Martha King learned the meaning of the surging, milling crowd in front of Wells-Fargo. She realized at once what was happening. Cal had told her the preceding night that he feared violence.

When she and the Negro reached the fringe of the mob, Pete and a few others had brought up a wagon tongue and were jockeying it into position to ram the door. With Snowflake's help she pushed and shoved her way through until she stood on the porch.

She kept shouting, "Listen, everybody—listen to me! Wait—please listen to me!"

Gradually they became aware of her and of the paper she was waving in the air.

"Look," she shouted, "you all know who I am!" Good-natured shouts admitted the fact. "Last night," she went on, "Cal Chambers was at our house. He told me in case anything happened to him—he expected something would—I was to open his safe with this combination."

Behind her Parker called roughly, "Hand that here!"

Brown stepped in front of him. He said grimly, "Leave her alone. Go on, Miss King."

Martha threw him a grateful glance. She went on, "He said I'd find an envelope about Jim Randall. I was to give it to Ben Brown."

Her words caused a division of sentiment in the crowd. Brown grabbed her arm and pulled her into the office.

Parker said to Pete in an undertone, "Get our horses ready."

Inside the office Martha gazed hesitatingly at Jim, sitting tied, gagged and helpless, but at Brown's urging, she knelt in front of the safe and started whirling the knob.

Parker stepped in, glanced at her, then walked out and lost himself in the crowd.

The safe swung open. Martha rummaged quickly through it and found an envelope with Brown's name on it. She handed it to him

"There's no real work going on at the mine," Jim said. "The whole set-up's a fake."

triumphantly. As he read it, Clem looked over his shoulder and read it, too. It was the letter identifying Jim Randall as a United States Marshal.

Meanwhile Martha moved to Jim's side. Brown snapped, "Take that gag off'n him." When that had been done, and the cord about Jim's wrists removed, Brown asked, "What do we do now, Marshal?"

"Help me find our friend Parker first," said Jim curtly. "We'll need a posse—I have an idea he's on his way to his mine!"

Brown went to the door and addressed the crowd. "We made a mistake, boys. Jim Randall's a United States Marshal. It's Parker we're after...." He went on to explain.

Inside, Jim reluctantly told Martha of her brother's connection with the ore thieves. He left her broken-hearted, crushed, but there was little he could say to console her. He walked out and at his appearance, a ragged cheer arose. With Brown's help he quickly selected a few picked men for his posse.

WHEN PARKER made a flying dismount in front of the Elkhorn Mine building, he found the sheriff, Turner and Pete in conversation. He said savagely, "Jim Randall's on his way here with a posse!"

"What happened?" King's face became gray.

"That blundering sister of yours,"

gritted Parker, "opened Cal's safe and found papers proving Randall is a United States marshal. We'll have to hide those sacks of gold ore in the storage tunnel and come back for them when things have quieted down."

Turner agreed, and at once they all pitched in to move the sacks. They had not finished when they heard the thunder of hoofs in the distance, and ran to cover.

A ragged volley met the posse as it rode up, with Jim and Brown in front. It gave Parker's men an opportunity to finish their job, close the door of the tunnel and conceal it with brush.

Jim reloaded his gun. He said to Brown, "I'm going in to look for one of those Lone Star sacks—I'll need it as evidence."

In spite of Brown's remonstrances, he started zigzagging across the clearing on foot.

From behind the shelter of a pile of scrap, Parker saw him and raised his gun. He had Jim within range, unaware; his face became grim and gloating.

"Got him now," he muttered.

The sheriff was crouched beside him. Abruptly he knocked Parker's hand up and yelled, "Jim! Look out!"

Furiously Parker brought his gun barrel down on King's head; as King fell over and lay still he fired a shot into his body.

Jim realized what had happened. He saw Parker skulk away, raced forward and paused for a moment over the sheriff's body, then shouted to the posse and closed in, charging into the buildings into which the bandits had retreated.

In the general melee his eyes fell on Brown and Parker, engaged in a hand-to-hand battle. Parker beat Brown to the floor, and then turned as Jim sprang at him. He tried to use his gun, but Jim was too fast. Under the battering, piston-like blows of the marshal, Parker folded up.

Their courage gone, the rest of the gang were quickly overcome.

Leaving the posse to clean up, Jim ran back to where he had seen the sheriff's body lying on the ground. There was no trace of it. He knew at once where the wounded law-officer had gone. Mounting, he raced in pursuit.

He reached Bannock City in time to see King dismount in front of his house and, reeling and stumbling, finally reach the door. Martha came out, cried out at sight of him, and helped him inside.

Slowly and sadly, Jim followed. He had his duty to perform. He found the sheriff lying on the couch, with Martha staring down at him, and Helen on her knees beside him, her arms about him.

Martha came over quickly and whispered, "Please—Helen doesn't know—it'll break her heart."

He reached out, patted her shoulder with silent sympathy, and moved past her.

Helen cried, "Oh, Mr. Randall, the bandits have shot him!"

"You can quit worrying," Jim said gently; "we've got Parker and his whole gang, Ed."

"Helen—I want—some water!" murmured King. As she ran off to get it, he whispered painfully, "Don't —let her—know—"

"I won't," Jim promised, his voice deep with sympathy.

"I wanted to give her everything —I got in too deep. Take care of them—both—" He smiled faintly at Martha; his smile broadened as Jim took her hand in his.

MOVIE ROUNDUP

Gary Cooper

OUR COVER STAR

Gary Cooper's life affords a biography of contrasts — a drama of make-believe on Hollywood motion picture stages and of grim realities on the American plains and Africa's veldt, of haphazard romances in which his name was linked with several feminine players of prominence, and of his eventual and happy marriage to Sandra Shaw.

He is the personification of "The Virginian," with a dash of the boy scout, a streak of the philosopher, and a good deal of "Beau Geste" in his makeup.

Born in Helena, Mont., May 7, to Charles M. and Alice H. Cooper, his early childhood was that of the average lad in that territory.

When nine years of age, he was taken to England, where he attended grammar school at Dunstable, Bedfordshire, and returned to Helena just before his thirteenth birthday to enter high school.

An inordinately tall boy for his age and extremely slender, he was sent to his father's Montana cattle ranch following an automobile injury. It was a robust young man who returned to Helena after two years of life on the open range. Satisfied with his son's health, the elder Cooper sent him to college at Grinnell, Iowa, where he remained two years.

In 1919 he set out to be a cartoonist on a Helena newspaper. It was his ambition at that time to become an artist of note.

Then someone told him of an extra player's opportunity in motion pictures — another glowing panorama spread before the imaginative youth.

His first step from the crowd came in 1925 when Hans Tiesler, an independent producer of Hollywood's "Poverty Row," signaled him from the mob. He became the boots and spurs hero in a flickering two-reeler. His first leading woman was Eileen Sedgewick.

Small parts in feature length pictures were now open to him, but it wasn't until he was cast as Abe Lee in "The Winning of Barbara Worth" that he achieved any serious recognition. His youth, personality and free style in that picture attracted the attention of B. P. Schulberg, then managing director of Paramount productions.

He appeared first, briefly, in "Wings," and later with Clara Bow in "It" and "Children of Divorce."

It was the heyday of Western

dramas that followed in the wake of the popular "Covered Wagon," and with the proficiency Gary displayed in the Clara Bow vehicles, Paramount decided to shape him into a new western star. It was a simple process, after his life on the Montana ranch. He imparted a quality of realism to his work, and with his first horseback success in "Arizona Bound," became the hero of Paramount outdoor dramas.

A long series of unbroken successes then marked his career, and he became the dashing caballero of the open spaces. Coupled with his expert horsemanship, he also looked the parts he played.

Then came the unwavering cycle of gangster films, which for the time being took the edge off western pictures'. excitement. What looked, for a short period, like a depression in Gary's career, actually proved a boom.

After "Fighting Caravans," Paramount decided to take a chance on Cooper as a hero in civilian clothes. He played opposite Sylvia Sidney in one gangster picture, "City Streets," and then appeared in two notable films, "I Take This Woman" and "His Woman."

Then, after taking time off to hunt big game in Africa (thirty or more pelts and skulls of animals killed, cured and mounted by Gary himself line the walls of the living room in his San Fernando house north of Hollywood), he played in "Devil and the Deep" with Charles Laughton, and "Design for Living."

Among Cooper's other hits have been "Nevada," "The Texan," "Lives of a Bengal Lancer," "The Plainsman," "The Cowboy and the Lady," and "Northwest Mounted Police."

Iris Meredith

Suggested feminine star for our Movie Prospect-of-the-Month

("Desperate Gamble," Page 56.)

Stop hounding the studios for a job and you'll probably end up with an acting contract, the experience of Iris Meredith reveals.

Auburn-haired Iris didn't get so much as a tumble from film executives, she discloses, until she stopped making the rounds of studios and got a job as a theater cashier. It was then that a producer noticed her individual good looks and charm and gave her a screen test which resulted in a role in "Roman Scandals." Numerous other parts followed, then her Columbia Pictures contract, under which she has been kept consistently busy as a valuable and dependable leading lady.

Born in Sioux City, Ia., Iris Mere-

dith was brought by her parents to Eagle Rock, a Los Angeles suburb, while still a baby. After a public school education there she set her sights for Hollywood, starting a nearly daily barrage on studio gates.

When both her parents had died, making it necessary for Iris to make her own way and to contribute as well to the support of two sisters and a brother, she gave up her siege on Hollywood studios to get a job as a cashier in a movie theater. And then, through the aforementioned producer, Hollywood for the first time showed interest in the girl.

Born on June 3, Iris Meredith has blue eyes, weighs 109 pounds, and is five feet, five. Someday, she says, she hopes to write. Riding and swimming take much of her leisure time.

Some of the Western films you may have seen Iris in are "The Cowboy Star," "Outlaws of the Prairie," Taming of the West," "Two-Fisted Rangers," "Texas Stagecoach," and "The Return of Wild Bill." She is now playing in "Thundering Frontier."

READ

The 10c

IDEAL WOMAN

Digest size magazine filled with fascinating stories and articles of great current interest for both men and women.

OUT OCTOBER 1

(Luana Walters and Bill Elliott in Columbia's "Across' the Sierras.")

There was a frankness, a straightness about her. Fanning liked people who used no subtlety.

OUTLAW TOWN-TAMER

by Lee Floren

It took a batch of killings to make Fanning's own home town like and respect him.

AFTER old Dan Fanning, the marshal, had been shot in the back, the town-council finally sent for young Mike Fanning, the old lawman's son. No passenger-train ran into the town of Running Rock, so Mike Fanning caught the loaded ore-train out of Butte. "Just slow down a little," he told the fat conductor. "I'll leave it on the run when we get into Runnin' Rock."

"Okay," the conductor said. They were sitting in the caboose, and the railroader was covertly studying the young lawman, thinking it hardly possible that a man so young could have attained such a deadly reputation as a tamer of roaring Western towns. "You're a surveyor, too, ain't you?"

Fanning smiled, easily. Wide-shouldered, tall and sinewy, he got to his feet and started toward the rear door. "Yeah, I learned to be a surveyor an' then I went to Cheyenne to open my office. Right off the bat they foun' out my dad was Dan Fanning, the marshal, and that my uncle Ed was the gent that gunned the law into Dodge City. So they ups and made me town marshal. They did the same thing in Fort Shaw an' Wolf Point. Reckon I jus' can't run away from a badge."

The conductor waddled after him, his heavy face wearing a frown. "There'll be a lot of trouble in Runnin' Rock," he said.

Fanning said, "I reckon so." Strong emotions conflicted within him. Once more he was returning to his old home town, the town that had once hated him and had almost made him an outlaw. And can a man fight and defeat an old hate? Can he win his way back into the hearts of people who had once cursed him? That problem faced Fanning now. He forgot it momentarily.

"Is Dad shot up purty bad?"

"They say he's in bad shape," the conductor said.

Fanning said slowly, "Dad should have known better than to cross guns with that danged Arapaho Kid. The Kid's lightnin' fast with a cutter, an' Dad's gettin' on in years. They tell me the kid was workin' for Rig Hartwig. Rig still got them other three killers of his? Cady an' Diego an' Flynn?"

"They're still on his payroll."

They were a mile from Running Rock now, and the train was losing speed because of the steep upward climb. Fanning picked up his suitcase and the bag that contained his surveying-tripod and they went out

on the caboose platform where Fanning looked at the ground hurrying by.

"I'll throw my suitcase, nothin' in it to break. Good luck, John."

The fat man grunted. "Keep your luck, Kid, you'll need it when you buck them three killers."

Fanning's smile widened. "Mebbe so," he grinned.

He dropped his suitcase and put a boot to the grade and left the train. Momentum carried him forward and he ran some fifty feet before he could stop, then he went back and picked up his satchel. The train rounded a curve, its dark smoke flat and heavy on the thin morning air. Fanning started toward the log depot which was about a hundred yards away.

RUNNING ROCK was to his right. Six years had changed the town little. The buildings seemed tall there in the indistinct light of the dawn. Their false-fronts blocked out a view of the hills beyond town.

When he entered the depot Lon Ryson, the operator, looked up and said, "We wasn't expectin' you until Sunday, at least."

"I came right after I got your message," Fanning said.

He set down his suitcase and tripod. He turned as the door opened. A man stood in the doorway. He was big, stolid, and his hands rested on his gunbelts beside his two low-thonged .45s. He lumbered forward.

"Mike Fanning," he said. "The lawman, back in Runnin' Rock!" His tongue moved out, wet his thick lips. "You got any sense, Fanning, an' you'll never take that badge!"

Fanning smiled. "I'm plumb dumb, Cady," he said.

"We don't need a bank-robber lawman here!" Cady growled.

Fanning's face paled slightly. "I'm no bank-robber," he said.

Cady laughed tightly. "Sure, the jury found you innocent! But why? Your ol' man was the Law, that's why! He knew the Judge, an' the Judge fixed it for him. Hell, you should be in Deer Lodge right now! An' this burg's givin' you a law-badge! That's a good one!"

Fanning's face was a hard, dark mask. "You're deliberately lookin' for trouble," he said. "Hartwig behin' this?"

Cady's reptilian eyes narrowed. "Hartwig gave me orders not to let any bums stop off in Runnin' Rock."

"Do I look like a bum?"

Cady's eyes licked over him. "I think you do," he said.

Fanning stepped forward. The telegraph operator started between them. But Cady, with a mighty heave, sent the man backwards. He looked at Fanning's thighs.

"Why not pack your guns?" he demanded.

"I won't need my guns to whip you," Fanning said.

Cady grinned crookedly. He looked at his hands. Big, huge-knuckled, he had beaten men insensible with those fists. He swung.

Fanning ducked. Cady lunged ahead, and Fanning hit him twice—hard. But the blows did not stop Cady. And they should have. Fanning had hit men that hard before—and floored them.

Cady bore in relentlessly. Though he was big and heavy, he moved easily on his feet. His bull-neck bunched, his eyes hot and dangerous, he fought like a fighting-machine.

Fanning gave ground. He couldn't let Cady clinch with him. He had to fight him at arm's length. He ducked, weaved, blocked. Cady fought fast and hard. Too hard,

Fanning thought. He couldn't keep up that killing pace. Fanning waited.

Then something club-like smashed into his ribs. The breath tore from his agonized lungs. He felt pain lance across his chest, and his knees felt suddenly weak.

Cady closed in, and Fanning hit him hard. Fanning heard Cady wince, saw him give ground momentarily. He went to work, then.

A chair broke. Glass crackled. Cady backed into the pot-bellied stove, upsetting it. Old ashes filled the air.

Fanning hit Cady under the right ear, clipped him solidly under the heart. Cady went down. He landed in a sitting position. His head went back and hit the stove. Skull-bone cracked on steel. Cady lay suddenly limp.

Fanning stood there and breathed heavily, the sullen heat of his anger dying within him. He felt of a swollen lip.

"He was one tough hombre," he told the operator.

The operator looked at the wreckage. "It'll take me a week to clean this place out," he said.

Fanning smiled. He left his tripod-case with the operator. Then, carrying his valise, he went down the deserted mainstreet, packing Cady over his shoulder.

A sharp anger, burning and hot, ran through him. It was enough that Hartwig had stationed Cady out to stop him from entering Running Rock, but Cady had been dirty to dig up that old bank-robbery charge.

OLD JIM SPENCE, the swamper, was cleaning his cuspidors in front of the Owl Creek Bar, and he stared widemouthed at them. "What happened?" he asked hollowly.

Fanning grinned. "This loud-talkin' buckaroo stumbled an' hit his head against a rock."

Old Jim laughed loudly. "You danged liar," he said good-naturedly. He wiped his grizzled paw on his dirty levis and extended it. "We're a-bettin' on you, Fannin'," he declared.

"Bettin' on me to do what?"

"To clean up Runnin' Rock of course! Some gents claimed you lacked guts, that you wouldn't ride back—others said you'd come hades a-foggin', seein' your pappy got shot up!"

Fanning nodded slowly. "How's Dad?" Kneeling, he took his two guns from his valise.

"He'll live, so the Doc says. He's down the State House hotel now."

Fanning looked at the big Surcingle Bar. "Hartwig still run that spread?"

"Yep. He's down there now, in a big poker game. Been gamblin' all night, they tell me."

"I see," Fanning muttered. He started for the Surcingle Bar, and old Jim grabbed his arm with claw-like fingers. "Don't take Cady down there," he pleaded. "Hartwig's got Flynn an' Diego down there, an' they'll kill you!"

"I'll chance that," Fanning said. He had his guns buckled on now.

"Don't be a fool, kid."

Fanning slowly disengaged the talon-like fingers. "This town sent for me to come in an' stop these killin's an' make this a good town. An' accordin' to my figures the Surcingle is a good place to start."

Fanning walked down the deserted street, his bootheels sounding loudly on the plank walks, his heavy guns freighting his lean thighs. Hartwig and three others were gambling around a green-topped table when he entered the saloon. No other range-

men or townsmen were in the long bar room.

Two of the gamblers were the gunmen, Flynn and Diego, and the other man was Tom Westerly, a Larb Creek cowman. They all stared at him, their guns momentarily forgotten. "What happened?" Hartwig demanded.

Fanning said, "Cady couldn't fist-fight as good as he thought he could, Hartwig."

Hartwig pushed back his chair and got to his feet, his hands hanging over his holstered .45's. His voice was a rasping whisper. "No man livin' could whip Cady with his fists. You used a club, you two-bit lawman."

Fanning studied him coldly. "You're a danged liar," he said clearly. His muscles tense knots, he waited to see if Hartwig would go for his cutters, and a fierce elation ran through the town-tamer. But Hartwig slowly drew back his hands, and Fanning found himself smiling bitterly. Then he shrugged his wide shoulder and Cady fell into the sawdust, where he lay on his back with outspread arms. Then, suddenly, Fanning had drawn one gun. The weapon's black bore settled solidly on Flynn. Fanning's voice was a silken purr.

"Be careful with your hands, Flynn."

Flynn jerked his hands hurriedly away from the handles of his holstered cutters. Tom Westerly got hurriedly to his feet and said, "I gotta hit the trail, men," and almost ran for the front door.

Fanning called, "You forgot your winnin's, Tom."

"Devil with 'em," Tom growled back and hit the batwings and went outside. Fanning looked evenly at Hartwig, trying to hold the man's shifty eyes. "Was the Arapaho Kid workin' for you when he shot my father?"

"What'd you think, tinstar?" Hartwig snapped.

Fanning spoke softly. "The Kid shot down my dad, an' I figger you hired the two-bit skunk to kill Dad. But your plans backfired an' Dad killed the Kid, instead."

Hartwig's heavy brows rose cynically. "Yeah...."

Fanning's voice held that same even steel. "If I can prove you hired the Arapaho Kid to gun for Dad, Hartwig, I'm throwin' you into jail! An' when I get that proof, an' you resist arrest, we're goin' for our guns—an' we're shootin' it out, Mister Tinhorn!"

Hartwig said, "That's okay with me."

Diego, a short fat Mexican, started to say something, his pock-marked face a hard, stony mask, but Fanning glanced at him suddenly, and Diego's thick lips froze over his unspoken words. Flynn stood as though hewn from granite, his face heavy and glum, but he said nothing more.

Hartwig repeated, "I'll be waitin' for that day, Fanning...."

"Let's hope it's soon," Fanning said.

But there was nothing more here, and he knew it. Later, guns would buck and roar, but that would be later, and not now. Accordingly, his gun covering the three, he backed to the batwing doors. Then he felt the doors behind his back and, cat-like, he stepped outside, half expecting a bullet to rip through the doors behind him. But none came, and his smile held irony.

HE CLOMPED down-street, nodding at the townsmen who were now moving on that plank strip.

Some answered his greeting, others stared stonily ahead, enmity naked in their glances. And this enmity, this antagonism, rolled like a huge wave against him, but no dismay touched him, and he kept on smiling.

Doc Wyatt stood on the corner, and Fanning went up to him. "How's Dad?"

"Bullet punctured his stomach, but he'll come along, though it'll be slow. He's got Room Nineteen in the State House. He'll be lookin' for you, Kid."

"Who's takin' care of him?"

"A nurse. Georgia Bradfield."

Georgia Bradfield? Sure, he remembered. About fourteen years old when he left. Long legged. He'd only been eighteen himself!

He went to the State House, climbed the creaking stairs. He rounded a corner in the hall and bumped squarely into a girl who carried a pitcher of water. The water spilled on the rug.

"Oh!" the girl said.

She stepped back. Fanning found himself staring. But who wouldn't stare? She was beautiful. Five foot five. Neat and trim. Dark hair tied sleekly back. Red lips—ripe, full.

"I'm sorry," Fanning found himself saying. "But I'll get you some more water."

"Really," the girl said. Fanning had the impression, suddenly, that she was enjoying his discomfiture, and he reddened slightly. But her next words made him peer at her even more closely. "Hello, Mike Fanning."

She was a stranger. How did she know his name? Then it dawned. She was Georgia Bradfield, his father's nurse.

"Hello, Georgia."

"Why," she said, "you didn't even recognize me, Fanning."

He smiled. "You've changed some in these years."

"I'm glad you came," she said slowly. "Running Rock needs a man like you. With these killings and this gambling and robbing—" She changed the subject abruptly. "Your father spent a restful night."

"That's good. Now let me get you some water."

"No," she said emphatically. "It was as much my fault as yours that it got spilled. Your father's waitin' to see you. He heard you were in town."

She turned and went down the hall. Fanning entered his father's room. His heart beat a little heavily. His throat felt suddenly dry. Dan Fanning had aged much in six years. His hair was now very gray. His face was deeply lined with wrinkles.

Fanning said, "Hello, Dad."

"Hello, son." Dan Fanning's eyes, bright and alert, studied his son. And what he saw must have pleased him, for he smiled brightly. "I'm sure glad you're back."

Fanning looked out the open window. "But how about Runnin' Rock?" he asked softly.

"Don't think of that, son. Runnin' Rock sent for you, didn't they?"

"Yes." Fanning's voice was husky. He thought of those glances, there on the street. Sure, this town had sent for him and his guns. They wanted him to bring law and order to this trail-town. But yet, he knew, these men did not accept him wholeheartedly. He was on a probationary period until he proved the old hellishness, the old deviltry, were dead....

"Don't think of that," Dan Fanning said softly.

Fanning said, "I'll try not, Dad. You bit off a big chunk when you killed the Arapaho Kid. The Kid

downed Bat Matson in Tucson. An' Bat was a fast man with a gun."

Dan Fanning smiled. "I had to take that chance. But I reckon you know that."

"Yes," Fanning said drily, "I sure do."

Silence momentarily. They were father and son. And between them, they had tamed almost a score of mad red trail-towns. Their guns had stamped out lawlessness. Their guns had brought peace and order and some measure of security.

FANNING thought of these gun-mad towns. Again, he heard the crack of hot guns. He smelled acrid skirling powdersmoke. And something inside caused the blood to move warmly through him. He was a true Fanning—a lawman. For that, suddenly, he was glad.

Then he thought, too, of that hellish day six years before. His youth had been a hot-blooded era. A time when he rebelled against society, rebelled and quarreled with his father. He had been wild.

But he had not robbed the Running Rock bank. He had not even helped. He had happened to be in the bank when the bandits struck. Been in there to cash a check he had got for breaking some Circle Y broncs.

Then the bandits had struck. Led by Long George Henry, they had made Fanning hold the sack while they rifled the safe.

Suddenly, guns started yammering. And, when the gunsmoke cleared, all of the bandits were dead. And there was Fanning, crouched under a counter, the filled currency-sack beside him.

Gossip started. Hadn't Fanning and Long George been gambling, two nights before, in Charley Jessup's? Maybe between them they had cooked up this scheme to rob the bank. Fanning and Long George were friends, weren't they?

What if Fanning claimed he had been in the bank cashing a check? That could be just an alibi to be in the bank when Long George and his men struck.

One thing led to another. And Fanning went to jail.

Old Judge Moore had scoffed. He came to visit Fanning in jail. And Fanning told him the truth so convincingly that the old barrister had no other choice than to believe him. He instructed the jury to turn Fanning loose.

Running Rock rose up angrily. Tongues claimed that Marshal Dan Fanning, through political influence, had gotten the Judge to turn Mike Fanning loose.

Fanning had left the town, swearing never to return. But he could not help but think of his father. Proud Dan Fanning. Carrying on alone. Facing those invisible enemies: resentment and enmity sired by the erroneous thought that he, an honest lawman, had saved his son from prison. While all other lawbreakers he arrested went to jail.

Fanning did not like to think of that, now.

"The Arapaho Kid work for Rig Hartwig?" he asked.

"He ran with Hartwig's gunhands. But that don't prove nothin' in court."

Fanning nodded. "I'll have to kill Hartwig," he said.

Dan Fanning said, "Wait till I get well enough to side you, son. That's a big chore."

Fanning smiled. "I might do that, Dad."

But he did not mean that, he knew. Running Rock had sent for him. And

he would tame the town single-handed, or die trying.

"Where's Judge Moore?"

"Prob'ly in his office. He's got my badge. You get it from him, an' he'll swear you in."

"So long," Fanning said, and left.

He walked down the hall, frowning. Could he prove Hartwig had hired the Arapaho Kid? Prove that, and he could arrest Hartwig.

Hartwig could ill afford to go into court. Running Rock tolerated him only because the town feared him. When Hartwig got into court, public opinion, the strongest force in the world, would convict him. Whether he was guilty or not.

Hartwig would never go to jail.

JUDGE MOORE was alone in his office. He was a short, pot-bellied man, past middle age and gray-haired. He shook Fanning's hand, his eyes lighted.

"Seen your Dad yet?"

Fanning told him.

Judge Moore's voice was soft. "Tell me what has happened to you in these six years."

Fanning told him about those towns. Those restless, growing towns. He told about the red roaring guns, the rearing broncs. About the men who had died. Deadwood. Malta. Barr. Hachita.

Judge Moore stroked his chin. "An' now Running Rock," he finished.

"Fanning said, "I hope so." He felt suddenly restless. "Dad's badge?"

"Oh, yes," the Judge said.

Fanning pinned the worn badge over his heart. Some sudden emotion moved up, and held his tongue. He felt like a kid again. A kid with his first new saddle.

"Thanks, Judge."

"Your deal from here out, Fanning...."

Fanning understood. This man had saved him from prison. This man had made him a useful citizen. He, as head of the town council, had called him into Running Rock. He was staking his reputation upon his choice of lawman. And Fanning swore, to himself, that he would never let him down.

Fanning left. He walked down the street. Again, he was conscious of the townspeople's glances. Again, the force of their opinions rolled against him. But his placid face showed nothing.

Georgia Bradfield stood on the corner. "I'm sorry about that water," he said.

"Forget it," she said warmly.

They walked down the street. There was a frankness, a straightness, about her. And Fanning liked people who used no subtlety.

"You've grown, Georgia. Remember the time—?"

"Please, Fanning!" she said, smiling.

He smiled, too. "You crawled on the wrong horse. But you put up a good ride—as long as you stayed in the saddle."

"But I didn't stay long!"

They both laughed.

The girl entered the Mercantile and Fanning went up to Doc Wyatt, who stood in the doorway of his office.

"Like a word with you, Fanning," the medico said.

Fanning entered the office. The stale odor of ether met his nostrils. "What's up?"

"Cady was just in, an' I patched him up. You sure gave him a terrible beating."

"Yes," Fanning said. He waited.

"Cady's drunk," the doctor con-

(Bill Elliott in Columbia's "Across the Sierras.")

Fanning got silently to his feet. "You killers ain't breakin' no jail tonight," he said.

tinued. "He'll try to kill you. He said he would, an' he wasn't jokin'."

Fanning frowned. "Cady in Runnin' Rock when the Arapaho Kid shot dad?"

"He was. Why?"

"Just a thought," Fanning said. "Thanks, doc."

HE HAD IT now. He'd jail Cady. Through Cady he would find out if Rig Hartwig hired the Arapaho Kid to shoot it out with Dan Fanning.

He entered the Trail Drive Cafe, and ordered. When he was half-way through his steak Jim Spence, the swamper, entered and took the stool beside him.

"Cady's claimin' he'll gun you down," the oldster whispered.

Fanning's brows rose. "Where's Cady now?"

"The Owl Crick saloon."

"Much obliged," Fanning said. He laid a dollar beside Spence's plate. "I'm standin' his," he told the hasher.

"I got a few nickels."

"Save 'em," Fanning said drily, "an' buy a horse."

He finished, went outside. Hartwig stood in front of his saloon, the Surcingle Bar. Diego and Flynn were with him. Fanning studied them momentarily. After a while, the three went back into the saloon.

Five minutes later, Cady came from the Owl Creek saloon. He walked unsteadily. Fanning went up to him.

"You lookin' for me, Cady?"

Cady halted. His eyes were bloodshot. "I sure am," he said hoarsely. He started his draw.

He was slow. Fanning did not want to kill him. So he used an old

trick he had employed often. He drew his gun, but did not fire.

He raised the gun-barrel, brought it down hard. Steel crashed on bone. Cady dropped his unfired gun. He folded at the knees, knocked unconscious.

Fanning grabbed him as he fell. He got the limp gunman over his shoulder, and started toward the jail. Townspeople stared at him.

He carried Cady into a cell, threw him on a bunk. He filled a bucket with water. He threw this in Cady's face. Then he clanged shut the cell-door. He went into the marshal's office—his father's office.

Ten minutes later, Judge Moore entered. "Hartwig was just over to my office. He tried to bail Cady out. I told him I couldn't do that till the man came up for trial. What do you aim to do with Cady?"

"Make him talk."

Judge Moore frowned. "Hartwig couldn't afford that, Fanning."

"That's what I figure."

"He might try a jail-delivery."

"He might," Fanning agreed. He smiled boyishly.

"Darn your hide," the Judge said affectionately. "You're a heller, Fanning. I gotta hunch mebbeso you'd like to see Hartwig an' Diego an' Flynn try to bust Cady out."

"Maybe you're right," Fanning agreed again.

Judge Moore grasped his arm. "There's three of them, Fanning. Gunmen, all of them. Those are big odds. Say the word, an' I'll organize a Vigilance Committee an' we'll hang 'em high an' dry!"

Fanning smiled. "You're some Judge to talk that way," he said.

Judge Moore frowned. "There are times when the people have to step beyond the law in order to obtain peace," he said.

Fanning said, "Forget it, Judge."

Judge Moore looked at him. "All right," he said. He left.

Fanning frowned. Judge Moore was right. Hartwig could not allow Cady to remain in jail. Cady knew too much—and if he told it.... No use heating an iron, no use hanging the man by his thumbs. A confession would do no good now. The next move would be up to Hartwig and his gunsters.

DUSK was heavy outside. Fanning went to the window. Lights were springing into life in various business houses. Somewhere, a drunken dancehall harpy laughed shrilly. A dog barked.

When it was dark, Fanning locked the front door and went out the back way. He walked down the alley about a hundred feet and hunkered beside a pile of rocks. Finally three men moved through the night toward him.

Fanning loosened his guns in leather, and waited until they were opposite. He got silently to his feet.

"You killers ain't breakin' no jail tonight," he said.

They whirled to face him. There was a moment's silence. Then Hartwig snapped, "Mike Fanning!"

Diego crouched. Flynn was the first to draw. Fanning's hammers fell. And Flynn died on his feet. Fanning's well-placed bullet saw to that.

Flynn's belated bullet spouted dust on Fanning's boots. Fanning sent lead roaring across the night. Lead that hit squat Diego solidly.

Hartwig's .45's coughed flame. Lead smashed into Fanning's thigh, and sickening nausea poured over him. He fired doggedly. And Hartwig went down.

The gun-roar rolled across the

town, then died. Men hollered. Boots pounded. Fanning started down the alley. The world was a red whirling sphere. He felt himself falling. Hands caught him.

They were carrying him now. They were laying him on a table. Doc Wyatt was there. And Georgia Bradfield. He tried to sit up.

Georgia held him down. "Please don't," she said.

"Are they dead?" he asked.

"Yes."

He lay on a table in the doctor's office. The outer door was closed. Beyond it he heard voices. Voices calling his name. Friendly voices. The townspeople.

He smiled. Soon his father would be wearing his badge again. He thought of his surveying-tripod at the depot.

"This town need a surveyor?"

"Yes. Badly."

He smiled. "You got one now. I'm startin' my office here."

He closed his eyes. He had come home at last. His past was dead. His guns had redeemed him....

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West-Test

MILLING

What does the word "milling" mean when applied to a cattle stampede?

"Milling" means getting the stampeding animals moving in a rough circle. It is generally dangerous work to start the stampeding critters milling. Many a puncher has lost his life in an unsuccessful attempt.

"PONY"

True or false?—As the cowboy used it, the word "pony" might be applied to any horse, regardless of his age.

True. No matter how old a horse might be, the cowboy never ceases to term it a "pony."

DOGGER

On a western cattle ranch, what were the duties of a "dogger"?

The "dogger" was the man who threw the steers and generally helped get them ready for branding.

"TAILING UP"

During severe snow storms, cattle sometimes have to be "tailed up." How is this done?

During a bad snow storm, a cow may become weakened and lie down. If it stays in this position it may become so stiff with cold and so weak that it cannot get up again. Cattle in this condition have to be "tailed up." That is, a cowpuncher twists and pulls their tails so hard they are forced, because of the pain, to rise.

HAT SIGNALING

On a cattle drive, starts, stops, and other directions were often done by a system of signals. If the foreman of the party wanted to start, how would he so signal to his men?

On cattle drives, the foreman usually signaled his wants by waving his hat. A start might well be a wave of the Stetson in the direction desired. A stop would be indicated by waving the hat in a slow circle about the head.

(Continued On Page 83)

The Truchos Whelp

by LEE MASON

Ken Laird didn't have the guts to avenge the killers of his father and brothers. But that was before vicious Notch Corkhill tried to take Eleanor by force.

"YELLOW!"

That was the bitter epithet Ken Laird applied to himself. It was an echo of what the Corkhills had called him that June afternoon when they rode away, leaving the last of the Lairds alive only because he was too young to kill, and too cowardly to fear.

Spawn of a family of fighting men, Ken had gone East for four years because his mother wanted him to be an artist. He was supposed to have inherited talent on his mother's side; her brother, Joel Thurber, had been

(Roy Rogers and Marjorie Reynolds in the Republic Picture, "Robin Hood of the Pecos.")

"Ken," Eleanor said, "I'm glad you let him see he hasn't a boy to deal with any more!"

a famous painter. Summer vacations when Ken came home, quiet, good-natured, gentle, folks looked him over and said that he took after the Thurbers, not the Lairds. The Thurbers were peaceful folk; they had little in common with the hardy Laird family.

The feud between the Lairds and the Corkhills broke out in June, over the ownership of an alkali flat which had furnished salt for the cattle of both ranches up to that time. Perhaps the Lairds were a little more edgy than usual; Mrs. Laird had died the preceding week. Ken had been called home because of her illness. But the showdown was bound to come some time; the Corkhills had been growing more aggressive and truculent every day.

In the scale of civilization the Corkhills did not rank high; but as fighters they were very near the top. Fighters of the tooth and claw variety, laughing at scruples or fair play, interested only in winning, no matter how.

There were four of them when they met Dave Laird, oldest of the Laird brothers, and whether they bothered starting a quarrel, or started shooting on sight, was never told. They left Dave a corpse, riddled with bullets. Two days later, they bushwhacked Ken's father, Paul Laird, and his brother Burt. Spanish Joe, the Laird foreman, got Russ Corkhill and also a Corkhill cowhand. Spanish Joe escaped, even though they chased him clear to the Laird ranch.

Eight of them entered the ranch yard and called Ken out. Very likely they would have shot him down, young as he was, but that Eleanor Wright, who had come to visit, came out with him. Ken was white and frightened; he looked down at the ground while the grim men on horseback jeered and basted him interminably.

It was certainly not chivalry that deterred the Corkhills from finishing the youngster then and there, and from taking Eleanor as well. Eleanor was the most atractive girl in the Basin Region. But to molest her would have made them pariahs, even in a country as lawless as this.

Lem Corkhill said aloud, "Well, there's the last of them—the danged whelp! What'll we do with him?"

"He ain't a whelp, he's just a downy little lamb," jeered Notch Corkhill. Eleanor despised him more than the rest because he had several times tried to force himself upon her.

Chip Corkhill spurred his horse close to Ken. He pulled the gun out of his holster and offered it to him by the barrel. He said smoothly, "Might be if you had a shootin' iron handy, you'd feel like throwin' a few slugs, seein' we're the ones wiped out the rest of your family!"

Instead of answering, Ken turned suddenly and ran back into the house.

"Why don't you let him alone—he's only a boy," cried Eleanor. She was fifteen, a year younger than Ken.

"Yellow!" yipped the Corkhills. They rode away after a while. Eleanor went home. That night Spanish Joe stole back and took Ken to a hideout on Truchos Mountain. And the very next day, the Corkhills assumed possession of the Laird ranch, stock and buildings. There was no one to gainsay them.

Up on the Truchos, the highest mountain in New Mexico, Spanish Joe went to work on Ken Laird. Figuratively and literally he fed him raw meat. Very soon stories began to filter down into the valley about the Truchos whelp. They were not always pleasant stories, and fre-

quently almost incredible. Stories of two human beings, one old, one young, who lived like animals and were as swift and strong. This was a considerable distance from what had formerly been the Laird ranch, and no one recognized the two as Spanish Joe and the last survivor of the Lairds.

For two long, solid years, Spanish Joe trained Ken Laird to become as formidable a fighting human as could be found anywhere along the Rio Grande. Fists or guns. Physically he succeeded. But whether he had been able to imbue Ken with a courage to match remained a question, even though Spanish Joe frequently reminded Ken of what the Corkhill killers had done to the Lairds.

Ken Laird had escaped from the Corkhills. But he had not escaped from his fear of them.

AND SO, after two years had passed, Ken Laird rode into Lanark with Spanish Joe, and after they had stabled their horses, they separated, and Ken walked alone down the main street. It would have been difficult to recognize in that lithe, wide-shouldered figure with the browned face and keen eyes, the timid adolescent who had fled into the house with the jeers of the Corkhill bushwhackers ringing in his ears. He walked with a long, silent stride, as swift and catlike as a puma.

Out of the general store stepped a girl whose hair gleamed like deep red gold under the sun. There was a grave serenity about her that was quite different from the wild little hoyden given to generous rages and hectic enthusiasms whom Ken Laird had known. But it was Eleanor Wright, unquestionably, and when she caught his glance she paused and stared at him, wide-eyed.

"Ken! Ken Laird! Is it really you—or your ghost? No, you're not a ghost"—as they shook hands and he laughed down at her—"because no ghost ever had a grip like that! Why Ken, you've grown to be a man! And what a man!"

He let her go on without interrupting, flushing a little. He had not seen her—or any woman—for two years. And she had flowered into a breath-depriving loveliness.

After a while, when she had come to a stop: "I wasn't sure you'd ever want to speak to me again, Eleanor—after the way I acted that day..." He had brooded on that scene for so long, he had castigated himself so bitterly, he could not hide his eagerness to hear her opinion. Perhaps she had an excuse for him.

She said, "Well, you never were a fighter, Ken! Not that you could have done anything that day even if you were—there were eight or ten of them and you were alone."

"Not alone!" Something shone in his eyes that no girl could mistake. "You were with me. I know," said Ken simply, "that if you hadn't been there—and interfered—I wouldn't be here today!"

Something passed between them that moment which would never be erased from the memory of either.

"They haven't changed any, those Corkhills," she said slowly. "Notch has been annoying me pretty steadily to marry him—there's only Mother and myself left—she's so afraid of him she thinks I ought to accept him or he might do something dreadful. They're as bad as they ever were — worse, since they — since they—"

"Since they wiped out the Lairds," Ken finished for her.

Her glance appraised him wistfully. "Maybe now..." She left the sentence unfinished, but he knew what she meant. Maybe now that you're back, a man instead of a boy, we can unite and fight them. Instead of feeling exhilarated or inspired, he had an impulse to turn and rush blindly back to the sanctuary of Truchos, where there were no Corkhills. The fear of them was an obsession, a phobia he could not overcome.

With the impulse came shame and self-contempt. But the fear was there, cold and sickening, turning his blood to water. It would have been easier for him that moment to blow out his own brains, than to face the Corkhills with their unshaven, hard faces, and their cruel grins and jeers. He rolled a cigarette with hands that trembled.

Perhaps she read his thoughts and understood; the light died out of her face and a small disappointment showed in her eyes.

She said gently, "Well, if you're still that way, you can't help it, Ken! Maybe it's the way you were made—just not a fighting man. Maybe we'll find some other way. You should get back the Laird ranch—it belongs to—" She broke off suddenly. She said, low and urgently, "Keep your back turned—and walk away. It's Notch and Lem Corkhill—they're coming toward us!"

His feet took him inches away; something inside of him stopped in his tracks. But his back was turned when Notch Corkhill's heavy voice drawled, "Well, if it ain't Eleanor Wright herself—jest waitin' for me, I reckon! Ain't that the way it should be, Lem? Man's wife-to-be waitin' all eager like, ready for the ring to be put on her purty little finger? How 'bout it, Eleanor?"

"Thank you very kindly, and I'm just simply overwhelmed, Notch! I don't know how any girl could refuse an offer like that—maybe it's because your face is in the shadow that you look like that to me!"

"Like what?"

"Oh, like something that crept out of a decayed log!"

Lem guffawed and Notch growled, "How'd you like it if I put you across my knee, right out here in the street?" He called her a vile name under his breath, and then Ken turned and faced him. Faced him, but with an effort of will, and his haunted eyes betrayed him.

"That's no way to talk to a lady," he chided inanely. Do what he would, the tremor in his speech was plain enough. And his heart was hammering.

Both Corkhills stared at him; in their quick glance at each other, Ken read their startled recognition.

Notch Corkhill's rash temper fled into his eyes, and drove out the surprise and wonder. He said thinly, "Mebbe we made a bad mistake two years ago, Lem! What are we waitin' for now?"

Ken knew with rising panic that the moment he had prepared for had come upon him suddenly. He knew with a cold and terrible certainty that if he stirred, he would be a dead man.

"Stand out of the way, Eleanor," said Notch.

And still Ken remained as motionless as though in a strange paralysis, even when Lem's rude hand pushed Eleanor roughly aside.

"Draw your gun," commanded Notch.

"Notch — no — please—no!" Eleanor flung herself at him.

Once more Lem's huge paw applied rude leverage.

"Your last chance, Laird! Draw!" Notch's glacial voice reached through the cold daze that had settled on Ken.

He saw himself lying blood-torn and bullet-riddled in the street, as had his father and his brothers, and fright in him was so powerful it even froze his face so that no emotion showed.

And then, quite suddenly, a pleasant voice said, "Ah, the *Senores* Corkhill, the good friends and neighbors! *Buenos dias, senores,* and would you be so kind as to take the hands away from the guns!"

Spanish Joe! Smiling so that his white teeth gleamed, while in his dark eyes death peered through polite merriment.

Both Corkhills glared at him uncertainly. They were formidable gunmen, faster on the draw than most, and with plenty of brute courage. But everybody knew Spanish Joe and the trick he had of fanning a gun without pulling it out of leather. There were no gunmen—or very few—who could match Spanish Joe.

Lem said gruffly, "Come on, Notch!" His pig-like, vicious eyes swept from Spanish Joe to Ken, and he gritted, "We'll be seeing you some time—when you ain't got your nurse with you, Laird!"

ABRUPTLY Ken came to life. A change swept over his face. It came in that one instant that he saw the queer little shadow of disgust darken the girl's face. That disgust was no stronger than his own. It was not only rage, but self-contempt that sent the blood surging through his veins.

He said in a hoarse, thick voice, "Wait a minute," and took two long strides that brought him close to the Corkhill brothers.

They turned and faced him, and he saw the hardening in Lem's long, angular features.

"You're seeing me right now," said Ken, in a strained voice, "and we're settling a lot of things now—you and me, Notch. You and me first—I'll settle with Lem afterwards!"

"Take him," barked Lem. His hand flew to the hilt of his gun, but even as Spanish Joe's warning sounded, Ken struck swiftly.

The blow sent Lem to the ground as though he had been shot, and then Ken was standing lightly on the toes of his feet and facing Notch.

But Notch shook his head. He walked over and helped Lem to his feet; even as he lifted him, he took the gun out of his brother's holster.

He said to Ken, "Not now, Laird—I'll pick my own time!" No sign of fear showed in him, and that Ken had to envy and admire. They walked away. Ken felt sick with shame, for he had his moment of introspection and knew that but for Spanish Joe he would have come away a beaten coward, or not come away at all. He had been too petrified with fear to fight.

"Ken," Eleanor said, "I'm so glad you let him see he hasn't a boy to deal with any more! But be careful. He'd shoot you in the back as quick as not." She said to Spanish Joe, "But you'll take care of him, Joe, won't you? This means as much to me as to him—we're having the same trouble with the Corkhills that the Lairds used to have, only there are no men in our family to fight them! Ken, you and Joe come and stay at our place, won't you? Until," she added proudly, "you get back your own!"

She had the romance in her that was natural to a girl of seventeen, and she visualized Ken as a knight

in armor. And he knew himself to be a coward.

"*Gracias, senorita,*" said Joe, "we shall be glad to stay at your ranch, Ken and I. Until, as you say, he has back his own!"

"I'll go finish my shopping," said Eleanor.

When she had gone, Joe led Ken back to the stable for their horses. They mounted and rode out of town.

For a long time not a word was spoken. Then, right there in the middle of the road, Spanish Joe reined up and turned in his saddle. His dark eyes were unhappy, the furrows under the graying black hair were deeper than Ken had ever seen them. The young fellow looked away.

"Ken," said the gentle voice, "you did not remember what I have taught you. Ken, did you not feel worse than if you had died? What is there about death you so much fear, *muchacho?*"

"I'm no good—I'd better go bury myself somewhere! You're just wasting your time on a yellow hound like me!" He spoke almost under his breath, his face averted.

"When you struck, it was like a wildcat," said Joe patiently. "You see what you can do? You say you will go bury yourself. They who were your father and your brothers will not receive you on the other side; their blood cries to you to be avenged." A little later he added, "And *Senorita* Eleanor who is your friend—she needs your help, Ken!"

Joe spurred away after that, and when Ken galloped after him, the older man roweled his horse and made it a wild race which gave expression to the emotions he had suppressed. When finally he reined up and Ken rode beside him, Spanish Joe said, "You are the Truchos whelp —the son of a fighting family! You cannot be a coward!"

"All right, all right," gritted Ken. "You've said enough, Joe! It won't happen again—not if there are a dozen of them and I'm plumb sure they'll fill me with lead!"

"Now we'll go back and take the senorita home," said Spanish Joe mildly.

"Okay—but we won't stay at her house—that'll only bring trouble down on them. We'll stay in town," said Ken, his face grim and pale, "until our own place is ready for us."

THAT NIGHT was a trying one for Ken. He tossed about for hours, unable to sleep. In the dark, still hours, all his old fears rose up and surged over him. He was glad when morning came.

At breakfast, Spanish Joe told him, "I have a plan, Ken."

Ken looked at him inquiringly. He had not eaten well.

"We shall not wait for them to hunt us—we shall hunt them. It is better to be the hunter than the hunted, is it not?"

"Just how do you mean, Joe?"

"You know your house well—so do I. We go there tonight and you will take back what is yours. Not all the Corkhills are there; most of them are at their own ranch. *Si,* Ken?"

"*Si,* Joe," said Ken.

They spent the morning looking up various friends of the Lairds whom Ken had not seen for two years; Spanish Joe found a few old cronies of his own.

When they came back to the hotel, Eleanor was waiting for them. She was pale and listless.

She said, "They came to the ranch this morning—looking for you, Ken, and Joe. And they've driven off more than half our stock, what lit-

tle we have. They said they're coming for the rest—soon. Notch wants me to marry him—and he warned me if I'm seen talking to you, Ken, or having anything to do with you, he'll burn our buildings and leave us homeless. Mother is sick from it all."

A rage such as Ken had not known rendered him speechless. And Spanish Joe, his black eyes glittering, said only, "So!"

Ken glanced at his older friend for guidance, although his own mind was made up.

"Go back home and wait, *Senorita,*" said Joe softly. "We will not be seen riding with you. Please tell your good mother not to worry—there will be nothing for her to worry about after tonight."

After she had gone, it was Ken who suggested grimly, "Let's get out of town, Joe. Let's keep out of sight until—tonight!"

Spanish Joe rubbed his palms together, and his smile was wide and sunny. "You wish it was already night, *amigo,* do you not! I can see it in your face!"

They rode out of town to a line-cabin in the foothills, and there they spent the day that seemed as though it would never end. Night came at last, and still they waited — waited until near midnight.

"Now we ride," murmured Spanish Joe. For two hours he had been sitting still and smoking, while Ken paced restlessly back and forth, like a prowling beast of prey.

They got their horses out of the clump of trees where they had been tied, and rode straight down into the open country. Two hours of hard riding brought them within sight of the Laird ranch. They dismounted, hobbled their animals, and stole on foot toward the house.

There seemed to be life and movement near the bunkhouse. Spanish Joe said, "I will wait down here," and placed himself in the shadow under the veranda.

Ken catfooted into the house. He walked through the familiar living room, ascended the stairway, and came to the room which had been occupied by his parents in happier days. He paused there, seeing light through the crack underneath, and heard a quick step pacing back and forth, back and forth. He heard voices and a low laugh.

He might be facing death, that thought did occur to him. But there was no fear in him, only a cold, implacable anger.

Gun drawn, he opened the door softly.

Lounging against the dresser stood Notch Corkhill. He had been watching Eleanor Wright with broad amusement. He straightened up startled; Eleanor stared with mingled joy and amazement. She took a step toward Ken.

Ken's gun menaced Notch; he waved Eleanor back.

"They got hold of me on the way back home, Ken," said Eleanor. "I begged them to let me go—Mother will be frightened to death. He—Notch—"

"I know," said Ken quietly. He advanced warily toward Notch; when he was close enough, his hard darted out and plucked the gun from Notch's holster.

Then he tossed both guns on the bed!

Notch put his head down and charged like a bull. He might as well have attacked a wild puma. Ken's arms were like flashing pistons. Their hammering tattoo straightened Notch; a crashing blow to the coarse face turned it into a red blur. As he began to fall, Ken

had him and lowered him noiselessly.

Not a shout, not a loud word had been spoken. Ken gathered up the two guns; swiftly he tore up a sheet and tied Notch, hand and foot; then he gagged him. The man was still unconscious and breathing heavily. No mercy showed in Ken's glance; this was one of the murderers of his father and brothers.

"Got a lot to do tonight," said Ken, curtly. "Can you stay here a little while longer, Eleanor?"

This new Ken Laird was a revelation to Eleanor. She said meekly, "I'll wait—but I must get home as soon as possible. Mother . . ."

"You'll be able to leave in a little while," Ken assured her. He went out and closed the door behind him.

A swift investigation showed that all the other rooms were empty. He heard voices from the bunkhouse, voices and laughter.

When he got downstairs, Spanish Joe materialized out of the darkness. Ken whispered what had happened.

"They are all awake," Spanish Joe murmured. "I think it is to be a raid—perhaps on the Wright ranch."

The Wright ranch, the Flying W, adjoined the Lairds.

They circled and came to a stop in the patch of darkness behind the bunkhouse and near the entrance to the corral. Men were gathered there, waiting, apparently. Some were already mounted. There were five of them, and Ken distinguished the harsh, cold voices of Chip and Lem Corkhill. A saddled horse, its reins trailing, was probably Notch's.

Lem's hoarse voice bellowed, "Someone go see what's keepin' Notch, the danged fool!"

Ken's high voice rang out like a trumpet. "Hands up, everybody—lift 'em!" His blood was a molten stream running through his veins; in that stream every bit of doubt or cold fear had been swept away.

It came fast enough. Instead of obeying, the men whirled to face him. Their guns leaped into their hands and spat orange flame.

Ken and Spanish Joe sprang apart. Their own shooting-irons flashed like winking lights. Ken did not even know when Spanish Joe went down. The night was split with the echoing roar of six-guns.

He saw two of the dark blobs before him melt to the ground. A leaden slug seared his arm; he felt another burn his left thigh. But he was crouching and jumping about, a bad target in the darkness. Was this what he had been afraid of? Was this the thing that had haunted him for two years? He almost laughed aloud.

Spanish Joe rolled over on his belly and fired with his elbow on the ground. Lem Corkhill was his target, and Spanish Joe rarely missed. He did not miss now. He aimed again. He and Ken cut loose at Chip almost at the same instant. Both their bullets struck, and they saw Chip literally hurled backward, his arms outspread.

Quite suddenly there was silence. One man only had escaped. He had darted around the corral and disappeared.

Then Ken knelt beside Spanish Joe. He asked, "Are you hurt bad, Joe?"

"Me," murmured Joe, "I think I shall be a cripple. But maybe I can still be foreman—even a cripple can ride a horse."

"You durned fool," was all Ken could say.

Spanish Joe murmured, "You were not afraid, *muchacho* — no more afraid. You are a real Laird now—a fighting Laird!"

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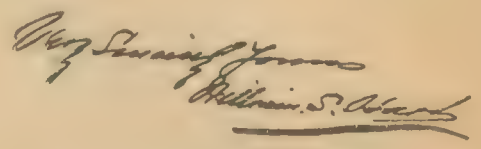

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(William Boyd and player in Paramount's "Stick to Your Guns.")

Jones' gaze rested on Don's low-slung holsters. He said, "Leave your hardware with me."
Fingering his holsters, Don said not a word.

Desperate Gamble

MOVIE PROSPECT-OF-THE-MONTH

A Long Novelette

by

Martin Brant

Here is this month's Western Movie Prospect-of-the-Month—our choice of a story we think would make a particularly good western movie. As usual, our illustrations feature stars who, in our opinion, are particularly well suited for roles in such a movie.

CHAPTER I

A BROAD-SHOULDERED, slender-hipped man reined up in front of the T-Square ranchhouse as the sun was dipping and the purple shadows lengthening. He stared about him with a puzzled frown. Vivid, West-wise grey eyes under yellow hair swept from the silent building to the empty corral, the quiet bunkhouse, the silent smithshop. Not a sign of life anywhere, only the wind sweeping down from the hills, and the plaintive calling of whippoorwills.

"Something wrong here," he murmured to himself.

Two years before Don Russell had mounted his horse and ridden away. He had left a terse note for his younger brother Gene: "T-Square is all yours and Ruth's. Hope you will both be happy. Don."

At the time it had seemed the only way out, the only decent thing to do. A man can't be his younger brother's rival in love. In a somewhat embarrassed, defiant way, Gene had told Don that he intended to get married as soon as Ruth Franklin said the word. That was the way he'd put it—as soon as Ruth said the word. Ruth was there listening—Don could still see the tender, amused light in her hazel eyes, and her warm smile. She had chided Gene, "Now, don't let's be in too much of a hurry, Gene—we all have a lifetime together ahead of us."

Almost maternal, and Gene really was only a kid. She was only as old as Gene, but being a woman, seemed older.

Women were queer, hard to understand, even a straight-shooter like Ruth. To be sure, no promise had passed between her and Don, no word

of marriage. But Don had thought it was all understood, and there *had* been long rides under the stars on the open prairie with the blue hills looming dim and mysterious toward the north; there *had* been quiet walks along the shores of Glen Creek with mocking birds singing and an occasional barrel owl giving vent to maniacal mirth. A man would naturally conclude . . . oh well, what was the use? Women were hard to understand.

Anyhow, here was Don Russell back on his star-faced sorrel, prepared to find Gene and Ruth living happily together. There might even be a toddler around named after himself.

At the time Don left, T-Square had been on the upgrade. There had been a particularly fine crop of calves, beef was fetching good prices, and good grazing had made the stock fat. It hadn't been easy to arrive at that stage of prosperity. Hard work and plenty of trouble had been the order of the day from the moment the two brothers bought the spread with the little money their father had left them.

More than once the human wolves had swept down from the hills and depleted their slim stock. But whenever that happened, Don had taken the trail with the grim tenacity characteristic of him. Still fresh in his memory were the long hard rides through gullies, washes and wooded hogbacks, rides that usually ended in the swirling smoke of .45's and .38's.

After a while, the quick-six brotherhood had learned that Don Russell was a good man to let alone. Once on a trail, he never gave up, come hell or high water, heat, cold or danger. And his .45 was deadly. There were easier pickings than T-Square; even "Red" Welch and his hell-slue of owlhooters came to that conclusion.

DON SHOUTED and shouted again. His voice echoed back from the rocky walls of the distant slopes, but no human voice replied. He dismounted and started to mount the steps of the veranda.

A voice called sharply, "Put 'em up—high!"

Don whirled and stared at the bald-headed, unsmiling man with the walrus mustache, who stood at the door of the bunkhouse with a leveled shotgun.

He called, "Sleepy, you old warthog, don't you recognize me?"

Slowly the weapon descended. Sleepy Sam Collins, the foreman of T-Square, hobbled forward. Without cordiality, and without offering to shake hands, he said, "So it's you, hey! S'pose you'd like to know where Gene is? Well, he's in Clearwater, drinkin' his head off likely, and gamblin' away the last few dollars he's got in the world."

"What's wrong?" asked Don crisply.

Sleepy Sam's lips twisted cynically. "'Bout everything, I reckon. What did you expect of a kid like Gene? Odds were too much for him after you left, that's all."

"What odds? What happened?"

The foreman regarded him with saturnine orbs. "See any horned critters around anywhere—any hosses—any rannies to nurse 'em? No, you don't—'cept mebbe my horse in the barn. Fust they raided was

the calf-crop, and when Gene lit after them, they bushwhacked him and shot a couple of the hands. They kept comin' back till there was nothin' more to rustle. Been gunplay 'round here 'most every day—they rustled us white!"

"Who?"

"Why," Sleepy went on, disregarding the question, "they was even takin' pot-shots at our cowpokes when they was jest ridin' around near the house! Time came when there wasn't any stock left and no *dinero* for wages. I'm all that's left—an' I dunno what's keepin' me here! And where was you all this time?" His tone became gritty. "Leavin' a kid to run a ranch!"

Don asked laconically, "Red Welch?"

"Him and 'Thirty-eight' Raskin. They've become pardners. You know Thirty-eight—he's a fox and a lobo in one skin. It was them two, all right—scorpions! And if you was to ask me, Fred Burdick's jest as bad!"

The name struck an unpleasant chord of memory. Don had always suspected Tom Burdick of buying unbranded calves without showing too much curiosity as to where they came from or how they had been procured.

"So Burdick's up to his old tricks!"

"Sure is. Buys everything them owlhooters steal, perticklar what they steal from us. And mebbe you can figger why he should lend Gene five thousand dollars on a mortgage on this ranch—which he did day before yesterday?"

The lean lines of Don's visage remained granite-set.

"Didn't seem to matter that you wasn't around to sign 'long with Gene, you bein' half-owner. When the money's gone, Burdick'll take over sure as shootin'—and the way Gene is drinkin' an' gamblin' his money away, it won't be long. Not that it's his fault. What's the use of buyin' stock to have them hill kiyotes run it off?"

Burdick's ranch, Open-O, was one of the largest in the county. It didn't adjoin T-Square, and Burdick had all the water and grazing-land he needed. What did he want T-Square for? Don voiced the question.

A quizzical light shone in the old cowpuncher's eyes. "Allus a woman at the bottom of it, seems like. He wants Ruth Franklin, I hear—or mebbe it's her sister Laura, I dunno which. Seems like Franklin gals have a leanin' toward Russell men—you and Gene are in his way. Reckon he figgered you might come back any day—and so did the gals. It's my guess he sicced them gunhawks onto T-Square special. Made it purty easy for them, too—Burdick's still got a corner on the politics in this county."

"How about Sheriff Wyrick? Couldn't you get him after them?"

"That old paisano!" Sleepy spat viciously. "He's dyin' on his feet—he's older'n Methuselah. What's more, Burdick's got him plumb hypnotized. And so here we are!" His arm decribed an arc that embraced the ranch and all the silent, deserted buildings.

In the pause that ensued, Don's reflective gaze settled on Sleepy Sam's seamed and weatherbeaten features.

"Yeah, I know what you're thinkin'." The foreman snorted with bitter derision. "Where was I when all this was goin' on? Where

would you be with a slug through your laig and one through your side? And I ain't much good yet!"

Don came suddenly to life, sprang into his saddle and dug star rowels into his sorrel's flank.

"If it was only Red Welch," Sleepy complained harshly. "But Thirty-eight! Who's here to stand up to him? You, mebbe—but you wasn't around."

His voice was lost in the pounding of hoofs.

CHAPTER II

AT A TABLE in the back room of Dugan's saloon in Clearwater, sat Gene Russell, and he was strangely unlike the rollicking, high-spirited young fellow of two years before. He had been drinking steadily, but instead of raising his spirits, the liquor made him dull and morose. Quite a contrast he was to the players he faced—they were bubbling over with mirth and hilarity. But there was no friendliness in their laughter.

At first there had been only two players in the game besides Gene. Then Red Welch entered, the black butts of his guns thonged low against his thighs, as casual and unafraid as though he had never panicked a herd or bushwhacked a pilgrim. It was early and there were no players at the other tables. Welch sat down opposite Gene and called for a hand.

Not long afterward a lithe, dark hombre with a scar on his cheek, who had come into the saloon with Welch and at first gone to the bar for his Prairie Tan, also joined the game, making five players in all.

Blue dusk settled softly, the yellow lights went on, customers started coming in, and a trio of girls began to sing, their high notes silvery against the background of men's deeper voices and gray smoke. Still singing, they marched down from the stage, circled the room and came into the back-room.

One of them touched Gene's shoulder as she passed, and he looked up at her. From the corner of his eye he caught Red's swift, sly move. His gaze swung back and settled on the outlaw chief, who gazed back at him with bland innocence.

"I saw that!" said Gene sharply.

"Saw what?" A wicked half-grin curled the thick lips; Red's tawny eyes became truculent.

"Saw you push your closed card away and take the one Windy handed you." He jerked his head toward the blond man and looked for confirmation at the other two players. But they weren't having any, thank you; their faces remained blank and their lips closed.

"Meanin' Windy and me was tryin' to cheat you?" rasped Red.

"Meaning just what I said!" Gene was a slender replica of his older brother Don, except that his eyes were slate-blue instead of grey. They looked unflinchingly into Red's round, hard face. "I suppose the card you grabbed is an ace—to give you a pair. Turn it up!"

He reached for the closed card in front of Welch, and the gross, bull-necked outlaw knocked his hand away.

Gene pushed back his chair and started to rise.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" The blond man's steel fingers closed on Gene's wrist. "Finish dealin', Red!"

But Red's hand was on the black butt of his gun. He growled, "Let go of him, Windy. He's jest yearnin' to be plugged—and I don't aim to disappoint him."

Windy shook his head. "No, Red, don't start no ruckus in here. Burdick's out there, and the sheriff—and you'll have Dugan yellin' blue murder you're spoilin' his business an' bustin' his furniture. Wait till we get him outside." He glanced malevolently at Gene.

With a sudden jerk, Gene freed his wrist and got up. He stood looking down at Welch.

"You can do what you like—anyhow, count me out of this game." Sudden bitterness overcame prudence. "You've cleaned out my ranch—can't you bear to see me with a few dollars in my pocket? I suppose, though, a man who'd rustle cattle wouldn't hesitate to cheat at cards." He took the money in front of him and stuffed it into his pocket, then turned to go, leaving the stakes in the center of the table.

Red roared, "Sit down, you yappin' welcher! Sit down or I'll bore you!"

Windy had risen and stood beside Gene. He snapped, "You heard him, squirt, didn't you?" As Gene took a stride, Windy grabbed him by the collar and jerked him backward. The violent pull ripped Gene's shirt open.

Instantly the yong fellow whirled and shot a rock-like fist to Windy's jaw. It knocked the blond man over a chair.

Too aroused to count odds, Gene turned up his own closed card. He barked, "Three fours—even if you have a pair of aces, Red. I'm making you a present of the money—add it to what you've already stolen from me, you sneaking bushwhacker!"

The blood receded from Welch's face, then surged back. His wide, coarse lips opened in an enraged snarl, and his nostrils dilated. Windy sat up, dazed; he put a hand to his jaw. Gene watched both warily. Two men walked in from the barroom and looked inquiringly at Welch. Then another stalked in.

"So you're holdin' three fours!" Abruptly Red Welch slammed his two cutters on the table in front of him. "Look at these, you tinhorn—two sixes! They beat three fours—yeah, they'd beat a royal flush! You're lucky Dugan's a friend of mine an' I don't aim to spoil his business. Let him have it, boys!"

Instantly they went for Gene, the three who had come in, and Windy, who had recovered and risen to his feet. There was a crash as the table overturned and Red Welch hurled his squat, powerful form at the young rancher.

Gene broke away and swung a murderous blow at Welch; it knocked the outlaw backwards. A hurtling body dashed Gene to the floor breath-

less, but he struggled to his feet, his fists flailing. There were five of them at him, and no one around who dared interfere. The two neutral players had backed away fast.

Abruptly Gene whirled and ran for the door. Someone struck him heavily from behind and grabbed him. He pivoted and clubbed the man to the floor. He was sobbing for breath and his brain was reeling, but he fought on pluckily as they hemmed him in.

If only Don were here, he thought bitterly. Often during these last two years had he wished the same thing.

Red Welch swung a chair and knocked him flat, but again Gene managed to rise, bleeding, cut, half-conscious. He struck out at the outlaw's coarse face. Then someone tripped him and at once they all piled on him. He struggled feebly, but Windy clipped him with a bottle and he lay still.

They began kicking him then, and Dugan ran in and tried to stop them. They shoved him aside, big and heavy though he was. A pallid, stoop-shouldered old man with a star on his chest came in and put a restraining hand on Welch's shoulder.

He pleaded querulously, "Now, now, Red, cut it out—tell your boys to *vamos*—we don't want no killings in here. You're hurtin' Dugan's business!"

Red Welch shook off the gnarled hand contemptuously. There might have been a day, long, long ago, when Sheriff Wyrick was an officer to be reckoned with, but that day was past. From Wyrick the outlaw's gaze swung past Dugan, who was again standing over the unconscious Gene, and finally rested on a wiry-looking man of average height, whose pale blue eyes were taking in the scene with an air of casual interest.

"How 'bout it, Burdick?" asked Welch.

"How about what?" From the threshold of the barroom Burdick smiled and nodded imperceptibly, then turned and walked back to the bar.

The sheriff called after him urgently, "Come back and horn in here, Burdick—come here and stop this!"

Instead of replying, Burdick put his back to them and faced the bartender, who shoved a bottle toward him.

Burdick was the justice of the peace in that section. Over Welch's face spread an expression of quick ferocity.

He said, "Let's get him out of here—grab him!" He bumped Dugan aside unceremoniously and seized Gene's legs; one of his followers went to Gene's head.

"You can't do that!" Dugan's cheeks were mottled and beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. "That would be cold-blooded murder! Let him alone, Red—you've done enough to him—he's half-dead now. Do you want folks around here to get boiled up and git after you?"

He brought up the memory of a committee of vigilantes who, six years before, had combed the hills and left rustlers hanging from trees wherever they caught them. Instead of deterring Welch, the remark seemed to add to his rage.

"We're taking him out," he grated, and glared balefully at the saloonkeeper. "What kick you got?"

"Let him stay here—you're taking him out to finish him—I know what you have in mind. He's only a kid!"

"Jest gonna put him on his cayuse and head him home," muttered Welch, looking furtively around. "Shut up, Dugan!"

Wyrick started to say something and Red yipped with sudden fury, "You, too, you old windbag—shut up!"

The others stirred and gazed threateningly at the old lawman. He walked away, his face chalky. Possibly he thought of Thirty-eight, Red's partner, whom no man cared to buck.

They lifted Gene roughly. His head hung back; suddenly he lifted it and struggled. Windy slapped him brutally.

And just then a voice in the next room spoke up clearly: "Anybody see my brother Gene?"

OVER the entire place a doomful silence fell. No one spoke. The men carrying Gene put him down softly. Gene sat up.

Even, deliberate steps advanced and Don spoke again. "Gene in here?"

Gene's eyes opened in his battered face. He whispered faintly, "Don!" His voice rose: "Don, look out!"

Now Don stood on the threshold, where he could watch both rooms; his hands hung loosely by his sides. He saw Gene sitting there, battered and bloody, with the outlaws near him; he saw Dugan, silent and morose, a few feet away. A stirring of his jawbones was the only indication that he was in any way affected, otherwise his features remained deadpan. But his eyes were live grey coals that burned with lethal fire. His slow stare turned on Welch, who stared back nonchalantly.

"Been a ruction in here, Red?" Don's tone was that of a man making a polite, casual inquiry.

"Don," broke in Dugan, "I tried to stop this—you owe me something for that. Don't start anything more in here—get Gene out and take him home. Where you been all these months?"

Don showed no sign of having even heard the saloon-keeper. He stood looking at Welch—and waiting.

Then he said gently, "A polite question deserves an answer, Red, don't you think?"

Welch's folded arms dropped to his sides. His elbows bent.

"Don't do it—he's fast as chained lightnin'!" Windy's murmured warning reached Don nevertheless; his narrow, hooded glance scorched Windy briefly.

A man coughed, and without turning, Don saw Burdick standing with his back to the bar, watching the scene with saturnine interest. Burdick shook his head when he met Don's slow, weighing stare.

"If," said Burdick, "you think I had any part in this ruckus, you're wrong, friend. How about a drink?"

Don wagged his head with gentle chiding. "Couldn't afford it—a man's judged by the company he keeps. I don't crave yours—I know too much about you, Burdick. Better let the sheriff have that drink—might stiffen his backbone."

At that Burdick's features tightened and his right hand jerked. But he thought better of it, apparently; he pivoted and poured himself a drink.

Don turned his flinty regard on Red Welch once more. Dugan picked Gene up and put him on a chair, where he sat mumbling dazedly.

"Look, Don," called the younger brother suddenly, "how about waiting with this shootout till—" He fumbled for his gun, and found it was gone.

"Shut up, Gene!" Don's voice was low-pitched and his gaze remained glued on Welch. They were merciless, those grey orbs—there was death in them. He said crisply, "Draw, Red!"

And without warning, Red drew with blinding speed.

Smoothly graceful as a cougar, Don's darting fingers pulled his own six-shooter out of leather. It belched leaden messengers while Red's weapon was still rising. Red's bullet ricocheted from the floor, but both of Don's found their targets.

As the outlaw folded and crashed, Don's smoking barrel made its small, inquiring arc. Gene rose on wavering feet, staggered to where his gun lay on the floor, and picked it up. He flopped dizzily back into a chair.

Not another man moved. Burdick spoke urgently through the side of his mouth to the sheriff beside him, and abruptly Wyrick put down his glass and walked resolutely toward Don. The old man made no move to pull his gun, but he spoke firmly enough.

"If Welch is dead, you're under arrest for murder, Don Russell. Hand over that gun!"

Stony-visaged and silent, Don watched the lawman's approach without moving.

Gene protested, "It's darned funny you getting so efficient all of a sudden, Sheriff—after letting that bunch jump me without lifting a finger!"

That stopped the law officer—for just an instant. He muttered something to himself and came on again.

"Better not!" It was only a murmur from Don's lips, but it might as well have been a shout. Everyone heard it. Wyrick paused, held by the somber fire in Don's orbs.

The door of the saloon slammed open. Glancing swiftly that way, Don saw Ruth and Laura Franklin. Both girls were white-faced and wide-eyed.

"Where's Gene Russell?" demanded Ruth of the bartender. She followed the focus of many eyes and saw Don. She cried, "Thank God—it's about time you showed up!" Both girls hurried toward him and perceived Gene. Ruth stared at him, at the weapon in his hand, at Red's prostrate form, at the Colt Don was holding. She whispered, "What happened?"

Don called warningly, watching Windy and the other outlaws, "Keep out of the way—walk around, Ruth!"

But it was Laura who reached Gene first. He got up, the girls took his arms as he staggered, and they made for the door.

Don backed out after them, passing Wyrick.

Wyrick said, "You and Gene get out of Clearwater and stay out. Been too much trouble 'count of you Russells. If you don't, I'll have to put you where you can't make no more. This here shootin' an' killin' has got to stop. You come back here after stayin' away two years, an' fust thing you do is kill a man."

Through eyes in which shone a queer look of amusement, Don appraised the old man. He drawled, "Now that's a right laudable sentiment, Sheriff—about shootings and killings having to stop. I'm with you one hundred percent, only it's got to apply to everybody. We'll talk that over real soon"—his glance flicked Burdick—"you, your boss and me!"

"And maybe Thirty-eight," suggested Burdick suavely.

Wyrick's voice followed Don to the door. "I'm warnin' you, you Russells keep out of Clearwater. I'm sheriff here and I don't play no fav'rites."

"So I see!" Don grinned and wondered whether the old bloodhound really believed what he said.

CHAPTER III

"OH NO, HE DON'T play favorites!" growled Gene faintly when they reached the girls' buckboard down the street. "Damned old snake, why don't he moult and show his true colors? He's one of the gang—Burdick's man—and Burdick does business with them."

Don pursed his lips, shook his head. "I think he's just yellow! Wyrick would like to be square—he's old and short of guts."

"Tom Burdick talked of Thirty-eight," murmured Ruth. "He's the one I'm afraid of. Tom was pretty well upset—he looked at me as though he'd never seen me before."

"Feel bad about that?" asked Don. He was looking closely at his brother's lacerated face.

"Don," said Ruth quietly, "you made one bad mistake two years ago—don't make another now. I don't care for Tom Burdick."

Don flashed a swift, questioning glance at her. He murmured, "Sorry, Ruth," and turned to Gene. "You don't feel so good, do you, kid?"

"Oh, I'm all right—now you're here it'll all be different—you big, thickheaded gazoopas! Where you been?"

"Yes, you're all right—I don't think." It was Laura who spoke; she was holding on to him; her voice held a note of bitter despair. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Don Russell—running away like that—without any reason."

Gene chided, "Shut up, Laura. My horse is in the stable—let's go get it and ride back to T-Square, Don. Been pretty tough going since you hightailed it." He reached out and squeezed his brother's hand. Don put an arm about him.

(Iris Meredith, featured in Columbia's "Thundering Frontier.")

Ruth's rueful half-smile and straightforward brown eyes told the complete story.

They started for the stable down the street, the girls in the buckboard, Don leading his horse, Gene making progress beside him on stiffly pumping legs. In front of the stable he stopped, swaying slightly.

"Gene!" Laura was out of the wagon in a moment; she grasped his arm.

Gene was mumbling, "You had it all wrong, Don. Meant to tell you that time that Laura and I were getting hitched as soon as Ruth was willing. The only female kin Laura had. I had to get her consent. Think I'd steal your gal, you dumb mule?" His cheeks were flushed, his eyes glassy. With cuts and welts all over his face and head, he looked a mess.

Just for an instant, Don's gaze met and locked with Ruth's. Her rueful half-smile and straightforward brown eyes told the complete story. He should have known; remorse cut him quickly.

"I'm going to take Gene home," Laura announced positively. "There's no one at T-Square to take care of him."

Don grinned without mirth. "Only Sleepy and his shotgun." He looked at his younger brother and the wreck they had made of him; death shone in the icy points of his vengeful eyes.

"Thirty-eight—you got to look out for Thirty-eight," Gene mumbled.

The very name made both girls flinch. Thirty-eight Raskin, formerly a deputy sheriff, now turned outlaw and renegade, was a formidable enemy for any man or any group of men. Half Indian and half Dutch, he was a wily, patient tracker and a dead shot. When he got on a man's trail, that man was done. It might take days, it might take weeks, but the moment would come when the half-breed's knife or bullet crashed home. Maybe from behind a tree or a rock—Thirty-eight preferred to take no chances—or maybe face to face—it was inevitable as doom.

Before Don had so abruptly departed, Thirty-eight and two or three picked companions had been operating to the south. Since then, it appeared, he had come to the hills about Clearwater and taken over. He and Red Welch had formed an alliance—it was that or an early demise for Red. Thirty-eight had been doing a profitable business in rustled stock with Burdick, and there could be little doubt he would be after the Russells as soon as Burdick got word to him.

This the two girls told Don briefly, and as he listened, his face became cold and dangerous. But without making any comment, he went into the stable and brought out Gene's horse.

"Ruth," he said quietly, "I'd be obliged if you and Laura would take Gene home with you. I'll get Doc Higgins to go out to your place and look him over."

They had to restrain Gene from getting out of the wagon into which he had been put while Don went for his horse. "Got to traipse along with Don—plan what to do. He might disappear again."

"You'll go with Laura and Ruth, Gene." There was something strong and authoritative about Don. "Time enough to start planning after you're on your feet—and I've attended to a few chores. And don't worry, I'm here to stay!"

The Franklins owned a very small ranch about eight miles out of town. Laura got in beside Gene to drive—he was mumbling in a feverish, disconnected fashion. Ruth mounted Gene's horse.

Her small, warm hand lay in Don's tight grip; her hazel eyes searched his—and were content with what they saw.

Then, under a star-studded blue dome, Don headed back to T-Square. His sorrel was weary, needed rest badly. So did he—rest and time to think. With a bankrupt ranch, the law as represented by Judge Burdick and Sheriff Wyrick against him, and the most formidable and dangerous outlaw gang in the state after him, Don realized he was up against it.

It occurred to him that perhaps Thirty-eight might prove friendly if he made advances. That would help a lot. He had met Thirty-eight several times and had exchanged indifferently civil greetings with the half-breed. So far as he knew, the outlaw was not hostile to him. If he could arrange a truce with him, to give himself time to stock up the ranch and get going again . . . he had a little money and Gene might have some of the five thousand dollars left . . . he had not thought to ask. Yes, that was the best way—honey catches more flies than vinegar. With the odds all against him, the best policy was compromise, until he was on his feet again. After that he proposed to make it pretty hard for anyone who picked on the Russells.

Damned border wolves, if it weren't for Gene—and Ruth—he'd have followed his inclination to declare a one-man war on them. Thirty-eight might be a good tracker and a dead shot, but Don wasn't exactly blind or decrepit, either.

There was another alternative: if Thirty-eight refused to play ball, it might be possible to gather the old vigilantes together once more.

He passed through Branton and, late though it was, the cattle were still moaning in from the prairie, the pens were full and the air pregnant with cow-odor. There he met Wally Kearns and stopped to talk with him. Don asked how the ranchers thereabouts felt about the rustlers.

"Well," replied Kearns thoughtfully, "it's this way: we're sorta letting Thirty-eight and Red Welch get away with it, it being understood they don't get too greedy. Cleaned out your spread, didn't he—while you were away? Seems like he had some sort of special grudge against T-Square."

"Red Welch won't bother anybody any more," stated Don grimly. He told Kearns what had happened in Dugan's saloon.

Open admiration shone in Kearns' eyes. He insisted on Don coming in for drinks to celebrate.

"You're about the only man I'd give a chance against Thirty-eight. Glad you came back, Don. But he'll be after you now."

Don shrugged. "I'm hoping he'll let me alone—give me a chance to get going. Maybe I'll be doing a Paul Revere to roust out the vigilantes again—don't seem the American way to pay tribute to a pack of thieves. Would you be willing to join up?"

Kearn said laconically, "Follow you anywhere, Don."

"Then let's call a meeting at my place for tomorrow at four."

"I'll be there!"

"Will you send word around to the others—you know who?"

"Sure will—leave it to me."

THE TWO HOURS Don spent with Kearns cost a man his life. Because when Don reached T-Square, the bunkhouse was blazing, and Sleepy Sam, a bullet through his chest and another through his side, was trying to creep out of the fiery inferno. There wasn't much life left in him, but before he passed out he was able to tell Don that Thirty-eight and another man had left only a short time before.

"Heard someone holler—jest like you did—thought it might be you. Look out for that Injun, Don—he's pizen!"

Don gritted, "I'll look *through* him—after I've made holes in him!"

So the lobo was already on his trail! He'd probably had word from Burdick and wasted no time. But for meeting Kearns, Don would have been at the ranchhouse when Thirty-eight called—he regretted he wasn't.

But he realized what it meant. They were ready to go the limit—burn him out, rub him out—he had no doubt that as a last resort a murder charge would be made against him.

It all meant that sleeping or waking, night or day, he would be in constant danger. And no matter how alert he was, the stalking hill-wolf might catch him unawares.

His position, Don realized, was a desperate one. A vigilante committee might get after outlaws, but here he had the forces of the law against him, too. He might become a fugitive himself.

And because it was a desperate dilemma, an equally desperate expedient occurred to Don. It had little chance of success, and if it failed he wouldn't be around to regret. He thought of Gene and Ruth . . . well, Gene would be no worse off than he was now, and as for Ruth—"men must fight and women must weep."

It was impossible to save the blazing bunkhouse but he managed to keep the fire from spreading to the other buildings. Not a living soul showed up to help him, and even as he worked he had the uneasy feeling that any moment a bullet might come from ambush and finish him right then and there.

Weary though he was, Don felt he had to ride to the Franklin Ranch to warn them. No telling but Thirty-eight might raid the little ranch for giving aid and comfort to the enemy. It was a twelve-mile ride, too much for his own weary cayuse, but he found Sleepy's mustang in the barn.

He might have fallen asleep while riding, but the thought of Thirty-eight was an effective cure for drowsiness. He analyzed the half-breed as he rode along and decided that it wasn't only because Thirty-eight was a formidable fighter, gun or fists, that he was so greatly feared; it was because he was wily and foresighted. He never took a chance unless he had to.

The ride was not uneventful. Four miles out of T-Square a herd rolled

across the range, driven by trail hands in a hurry to get the beef to Branton in time to put them on the train leaving in the morning.

A boogery-eyed steer broke from the herd, and a cowboy rode slantwise across it. He veered alongside the enraged creature and pulled his rope across its cheek. The sting of the rope turned the steer; the cowboy's well-trained pony wheeled with it, loping at its flank.

Don recognized an old T-Square hand and shouted, "Hey, Jim Lonergan!" The man looked up quickly.

Like a flash the steer turned. There was a thudding crash and Lonergan's horse flew head over heels in a threshing leap. Its rider flew free and got up, but the horse stayed down with a broken fore leg.

Straight down upon the cowpuncher charged the maddened steer and Lonergan, only half-conscious, merely stood swaying.

There was only one thing to do and Don did it. He palmed his .45, dug rowels into his horse and raced toward the animal. The red-eyed beast did not even swerve, and Don pulled his trigger twice. The steer hit dirt and brought up within a foot of Lonergan.

Don spurred to his side. "Hurt bad?"

Lonergan shook his head clear and peered up at him. "It's Don Russell, ain't it? I'll be jigsawed! Where you been the last two years?"

Don dismounted; the two shook hands cordially.

"That wouldn't've happened if I wasn't so doggoned tired I can't see straight. Forty-eight hours ridin' without a letup to speak of—Burdick likes to bring in his beef at night—when they ain't so easy reckernized."

"You working for Burdick? That his beef?"

"Got Burdick's iron on 'em, if that's what you mean—leastways it's on top of any other." He looked fixedly at Don. "Plenty of 'em belongs to you," he muttered. "That's on the Q. T." A trail hand was riding toward them, shouting Lonergan's name. "Be all my job was wuth—my life too, mebbe—if I was seen talkin' you. So long, Don—good luck!"

He hobbled to meet the approaching rider.

Don touched light spurs to his animal and jogged off. Jim Lonergan working for Burdick! He would be a good witness against the crooked rancher when the proper time came—if he wasn't afraid to talk. Here was direct confirmation that Burdick was a receiver of stolen goods.

CHAPTER IV

A WATCHFUL ranny stopped Don at the gate of the Franklin Ranch.

In a few minutes the watchman brought Randy Franklin. He was a man of striking appearance, three inches over six feet, with snow-white hair and a tanned, blocky face. He shook hands with the late visitor and regarded him quizzically.

"You took your time coming back, Don. If I were Ruth, I wouldn't even talk to you."

"I wouldn't blame her—I've given myself a worse hurrahing than

you possibly can, Randy. It was all a misunderstanding—comes of jumping to conclusions too fast. How's Gene?"

"He's a sick boy, all right—concussion. He'll have to take it easy for a month at least, the doctor says. What brings you here at this hour, Don?"

"Came to warn you . . . Thirty-eight raided my place and killed Sam Collins, the foreman. Burned down one of my buildings. Reckon you realize what that means, don't you? If he hears you're harboring Gene—if he hasn't heard it already . . ."

Franklin frowned thoughtfully. "Got a record of always getting his man, hasn't he—damned prowling wolf!" He took a deep breath and stretched his arms. "Dunno whether to cuss you Russells or thank you . . . I'm plumb weary of nursing tenderfeet . . . about time I gave it up."

"Sorry to cause you trouble," said Don somewhat stiffly.

Franklin grinned at him. "Man ought to be ready to stand by his friends. I'll post guards around the place—get out the old shotgun and prowl around a little myself. Wasn't a bad gunslammer in the old days, though never as good as you—or Thirty-eight." A sparkle came into his eyes and he added musingly: "Like to be around when you two meet. Be careful, Don, for Gene's sake—and I don't mind saying for Ruth's, too. Can't see what there is about you has taken her fancy, but she does—er—like you, Don."

A flush crept into Don's cheeks. He said, "That's more than I deserve, Randy—I was a darned fool two years ago. I'll make it up to her if she'll let me. Well, I'd better be moseying along . . ."

"Why not stay overnight? We'll talk things over in the morning."

But Don shook his head doggedly. "I got a notion Thirty-eight and his bunch might be coming back to T-Square to finish the job they started. Something must've scared them off before they set fire to the rest of the buildings. I aim to be there when they come again. Just one thing, Randy . . ."

"What?"

"Wally Kearns is getting the ranchers hereabouts to meet at my place tomorrow about four. Care to come?"

"Sure do. I'll be there. What's more, I'll make the rounds and get some of the others around here."

Dawn was breaking when Don approached his ranch. He circled through short-leaf pine and staked his cayuse in a clump of shinneries above a stream behind the empty corral. On foot he made his way through the cypress bordering the stream on both sides until he came to the rear of the barn. There he stood listening.

The tang of sage and buckbrush came to his nostrils. A scissor-tailed flycatcher flew past, and a cotton-tail stared down at him inquiringly.

Convinced at last there were no human intruders in the vicinity, he nevertheless catfooted to the charred ruin that had been his bunkhouse and entered the ranchhouse through the rear, passing the inanimate form of Sam Collins which still lay covered as he had left it.

A quick openinng of doors all through the house satisfied him—with

Thirty-eight one could not be too careful. He needed sleep for the hard day before him. If not enough ranchers appeared at the meeting, there would be long rides to gather them. And after that would come the hunt for Thirty-eight. About that, Don had no illusions. If Thirty-eight didn't wish to be caught, he wouldn't be. He might leave that section if the hunt became hot, but if he elected to stay, every tree, every rock, every wash would be a potential ambush.

Worst of it was that the bushwhacker actually had the law, as represented by Judge Burdick and Sheriff Wyrick, on his side.

Fully dressed, he threw himself on a bed in a room that fronted the road, and fell asleep—lightly. Don possessed the ability to sleep as lightly as a cougar in a covert.

And so it was that he heard the sound of hoofs even before the shout that brought him to the window, gun in hand.

Five mounted men sat their horses in front of the veranda. He recognized Long Lou Byrd, a deputy sheriff. Then his eyes fell on a swart, beady-eyed man he knew—Kid Stephens, a marihuana smoker and an outlaw killer always associated with Thirty-eight. He didn't know the other three.

But a sixth man had dismounted and stood so that his black-maned buckskin was a rampart. Don grinned bleakly as he saw the yellow eyes in the lean, triangular face above the pony's neck.

This was Thirty-eight himself—a wolf among coyotes—and as usual, he wasn't taking any chances. The others might, but not he. Indian wile and Dutch cunning were a combination hard to beat.

What puzzled Don was the presence of Long Lou with this bunch of gunhawks. Then his eyes widened with astonished understanding. They all wore stars fastened on their shirts. All deputy sheriffs. He couldn't see whether Thirty-eight wore one, but quite likely he did, since the others had them. Thirty-eight a deputy sheriff again!

Long Lou remarked audibly, "There ain't nobody around." But he shouted again, "Hey, Don Russell, you in there?"

He was merely making sure, but Don had no doubt Thirty-eight would soon find out. He would find Don's tracks even if the others missed them.

"Right here!" called Don, and poked his head out of the window.

Their astonishment was obvious. Then Long Lou commanded, "Come out here, Don!"

"If," drawled Don, "you'll persuade our cautious Injun friend to come from behind that pony where I can see all of him, I'll be right glad to come out and palaver."

"He's a deppity sheriff," Long Lou informed him unblushingly. "We got a warrant for you for the murder of Red Welch. Come out peaceable or we'll have to come get you."

"You walking out from behind that cayuse, Thirty-eight?" asked Don.

The half-breed's high, reedy voice answered him. "I cain't digest lead no better'n you can, Russell—and you got a reputation for bein' sorta

quick with your shootin'-iron. Reckon I'll stay right here, but you don't have to worry none—I'm a deppity sheriff again, like Lou told you."

Don's laugh was short and derisive. "So Wyrick thinks he can make a watchdog out of a wolf by putting a star on his chest! Where is he? Why didn't he come with you?"

"You're askin' a lot of questions," snapped Long Lou, "and I'll answer jest this one and no more. Sheriff ain't feelin' well—he's stayin' at Burdick's place. We'll take you out there to see him if you like. Come out pronto or we'll have to come in for you."

"You said that before—seems sort of windy where you are." Don's tone was calm and musing—he had never liked the shifty-eyed deputy. "First man reaches for hardware gets lead. Reckon you know me, Lou, but if you doubt what I say, reach for your gun."

Not a man moved.

Long Lou blustered, "You're runnin' a-foul of the law now, Don Russell. Even if you get away from us, you'll have a posse fannin' your hocks. I'm givin' you one more chance to submit to arrest peaceable."

Don sat in silent reflection while the visitors fidgeted but kept their hands away from their holsters. Above the pony's mane, Thirty-eight's yellow orbs watched him interestedly.

"If it's me you're afraid of," remarked the half-breed, "I'll ride on."

"No, don't do that." Don's tone was soft. "How about you and me, man to man? Let the rest of 'em ride on, and you and I settle it, Injun. Ain't afraid, are you?"

Thirty-eight's laugh was like the rasping of a saw. From under his pony's belly his gun belched lead.

But Don had perceived the movement and swiftly withdrawn his head. The slug crashed through the window into the opposite wall.

Crouching below the window sill, Don threw a chair across to the other window, but remained where he was. The bullets flew—they all cut loose. Raising his head Don saw Thirty-eight leading his mustang to the gate. A volley greeted his appearance, and he pressed back against the wall. His quick bullet burned the rump of Thirty-eight's pony and the animal plunged and raced toward the gate. But Thirty-eight had sprung on its back as though he were made of India-rubber, and lay there in a Comanche drag that left no part of him exposed above the kak.

The others spurred after him—peering above the sill, Gray Don could see them. He could easily have potted one or two of them—but not Thirty-eight. That wily hombre managed to keep a rider between him and the house all the time.

No sooner were they out of sight than Don left the ranchhouse through the rear door. He made sure first that no one was lying in ambush. He found his horse where he had left him, mounted and rode hard—directly toward Burdick's ranch!

His plan was a desperate one, but so was his dilemma. Not even a committee of vigilantes would be willing to help a fugitive from justice. And with a warrant out for his arrest for murder, that was exactly Don's status.

CHAPTER V

A MILE or so from the ranchhouse, Thirty-eight called to Long Lou and the party reined up.

"You all go on to Clearwater," said the outlaw. "He might be going there to git in touch with the United States marshal." He turned his horse and started back.

"You goin' back to shoot it out with him?" demanded Long Lou.

Thirty-eight promised laconically, "I'll get him!" He rode off.

They sat for a moment looking after him. The beady-eyed man grunted, "Any time he gits after a gent, that gent might's well order a wooden jacket."

"Give Don an even break and it would be a good fight," muttered another. "But that's one thing he'll never get from Thirty-eight. Goes agin me—"

Kid Stephens snapped, "Shut up! Who you workin' for, Don Russell or Tom Burdick?"

It did not take Thirty-eight very long to find and read the meaning of the fresh tracks behind the barn and across to the road. He headed toward Open-O behind Don.

As long as the trail was an open one, Thirty-eight kept his buckskin at a gallop. In the half-light, the tracery of paloverde made a ghostly show. But when the trail dipped over the gravelly bottom of a wash, about two miles from the huddle of buildings in Open-O, the outlaw chief dismounted, staked his horse and loped ahead on foot.

His quarry, he knew by the tracks, was not far ahead of him. Thirty-eight's yellow eyes shone like those of a cat. Don's casual indifference had always been an affront to him, and the contemptuous sobriquet of "Injun" flung at him a while ago had bitten deep. He knew that Burdick wanted Don Russell out of the way, but what drove the half-breed much more was his own personal venom.

The trail led across a brook from which the ranchhouse was visible, then through cottonwoods to the clearing. There it ended. The bunkhouse was nearest, then the cookhouse and the corral. These woods bordered Open-O on the west side only; on the other sides was open range.

From behind a huge cottonwood, Thirty-eight saw Don pause and dismount. As good a time to finish the job as any—Thirty-eight drew his gun.

But there were trees between them, and with soft, sure step, he stalked nearer to his quarry. Gun in hand, he watched curiously as Don called to a man who sat whittling in front of the bunkhouse.

The man slouched across and the half-breed recognized him: Jim Lonergan, one of Burdick's hands.

The two men stood talking together, then Don mounted, kneed his horse and rode straight across toward the gate of the ranchhouse.

Thirty-eight replaced his gun in its holster, moved swiftly across and called to Lonergan, who came back to him.

"What did he want?" demanded the half-breed.

Lonergan's eyes made an unfriendly appraisal. "You after him, Thirty-eight?"

Instead of replying, Thirty-eight asked, "Is Burdick home?"

"No, but Sheriff Wyrick is." Abruptly Lonergan's six-gun flew to his hand. It pointed straight at the outlaw. Lonergan said, "I'll take that cutter! You'll not bushwhack any friend of mine. Don is my buddy!"

Thirty-eight slouched at ease and smiled. In a group of a hundred men, he would have excited the least attention. Although made of steel, he was neither tall nor broad. But when he smiled there was a wolfishness about the grimace and the huge white teeth that was bound to single him out anywhere.

He said, "Ain't you workin' for Burdick no more?"

"So what? Does that mean I got to stand for murder? If you had the guts of a louse, you'd have it out with Don face to face 'stead of schemin' to dry-gulch him."

Lonergan was tall, wiry, powerful, and his eyes blazed with disgust.

"You talk like a cap-and-ball mossyhorn," grunted Thirty-eight. "Didn't know Burdick had any waddies like you workin' for him." His glance veered toward Don, who had passed through the gate and reined up in front of the veranda. He said, "There's the sheriff comin' out to meet him—he'll hogtie him and throw him into the hoosegow!"

Lonergan looked—and Thirty-eight's steel fingers closed on his wrist and jerked it upward. Powerful though the cowboy was, the half-breed handled him like a child. His fist crashed into Lonergan's chin like a piston, and he jerked the gun out of his grasp. Before the waddy could fall to the ground, Thirty-eight had him. He lifted him like a sack, carried him back farther into the woods and dropped him in a clump of sumacs. Then, as Lonergan lay there, half-conscious, he struck him over the head with the butt of his pistol, once and again. Lonergan twitched and lay still.

For a moment the outlaw stood over him reflectively. He drew out a large clasp knife, then apparently changed his mind and put it away. A little later, having concealed the cowboy from view, he went back and squatted behind a tree. He threw Lonergan's gun away, took out his own and made sure it was loaded. It was always loaded, but Thirty-eight's outstanding characteristic was caution. That was the reason he had lived so long.

THE RANCHHOUSE stood on a post-oak flat. Below it were the other buildings. Smoke curled upward from the cookhouse, and a man in a dirty white apron came to the door and glanced curiously toward Don as he sat his horse in front of the veranda. Two other cowboys sitting on the corral fence noticed him with idle curiosity.

He dismounted, tied his horse to a worn hitch-rack near the steps, and began ascending to the porch.

A hard-faced woman whose black hair was turning gray rose and faced him. Her eyes widened suddenly, and into them came a look of quick interest.

Don had never seen her before. He said, "Burdick isn't in, is he?" Lonergan had told him that. "I'd like to see the sheriff."

She said, "You're Don Russell, aren't you? I saw you in town yesterday. I'm Mrs. Shaw."

"Related to Tom Burdick?" asked Don with wary politeness.

"No such bad luck—I'm the new housekeeper—the one before me didn't suit—she was too much of a lady. I'm not. So you're here to see Judge Burdick and the sheriff."

"Judge Burdick!" Don had never heard him called that before. He nodded easily and smiled. "Yes—since he isn't here, I'd like to have a powwow with the sheriff. He's here, isn't he?"

Her lips twisted in a scornful smile. "That old busky! Ought to be in an old folks' home. If he's a sheriff, I'm a cowboy! He's taking a nap upstairs. Want I should call him?"

"Not necessary—I'll go up to his room," said Don smoothly.

He felt her eyes on him as he opened the screen door and started up the stairs. She called, "It's the room at the rear end of the hall," and turning, he met her grim, intent stare. If she went out and called a few men, that would be the end of it for Don Russell. He couldn't make her out—there was something cryptic about her expression and manner.

When he opened the door, Wyrick was lying on the bed minus shoes and coat, his eyes closed. He was not asleep; as Don paused beside the bed, his eyes opened and he sat up.

"There's going to be a meeting of ranchers at my place this afternoon," said Don directly. "I came to fetch you."

Wyrick's eyes blinked. "Vigilante committee?"

"You might call it that." His exploring glance discovered the sheriff's belt and holster on the dresser. He strode across, took out the gun and slipped it inside his waistband, and that act must have explained everything to the law-officer.

Wyrick sighed gently. "You didn't have to do that—I'll be plumb happy to resign."

His sincerity was evident . . . just a thin, tired old man.

Don said sharply, "You made a deputy sheriff of Thirty-eight and a lot of his gun-slammers, didn't you—put stars on them and told them to go get me!"

"Not I—Burdick. Dunno where he got all them badges, but he got them somewhere. Anyhow, he's the judge—and you did kill Red Welch."

"Did you," Don gritted, "expect me to kiss him after he near beat my brother to death? I gave him a chance to draw, didn't I? And how many decent men has he rubbed out? Why didn't you arrest him long ago?"

Before this tirade, the old man seemed to shrink. He made no reply.

"Is there a warrant out for my arrest?"

Wyrick nodded. He said slowly, "This place ain't exactly healthy for

you, Don. Might be better if we left right now. I'm willin' to go with you."

"Not without Burdick," said Don, and as the sheriff's brows knit, puzzled and incredulous, he turned and left the room, shutting the door carefully behind him.

On the veranda he found Mrs. Shaw seated in a rocker. He sat down near her.

"You waiting for Tom Burdick?" she asked quietly.

Don nodded.

"You here to smoke the pipe of peace with him—sell him your ranch?"

No expression showed on his face and his lips remained closed.

"My husband was Joe Shaw," said the woman, watching him. "He was a man like yourself—didn't count odds—which is why he's six feet under. I don't like to see a brave man and a square one die young. Why don't you leave while you can?" As he still remained mute, she added, "I'm 'most old enough to be your mother—it's for your sake I'm talking—maybe too much."

Don stirred and met her eyes squarely, a glimmer of a smile on his face. "Thanks, Mrs. Shaw—I savvied that much and I'm obliged. How soon do you expect Burdick?"

She shook her head and sighed. "Should be here for his dinner any minute now." She got up and went inside.

CHAPTER VI

TWO RIDERS came in at the gate near the corral and Don recognized one of them, Shorty Watkins, a saddle-warped oldster but a tough one. Shorty stared at him, then dismounted and came slowly to the rail of the veranda.

He said, "Hello, Don. Heard you was back but didn't expect to see you here."

Don nodded and exhaled smoke from a cigarette.

"Waitin' to see Tom?" asked Shorty tentatively.

Again Don nodded.

"He'll be along soon." Shorty's mouth twisted and he shook his head. "You got plenty sand in your craw, I'll say that." He murmured something to the lean cowpuncher who had come over while he was speaking, and the cowpuncher threw an interested glance at Don over his shoulder as the two walked off.

It became evident shortly afterward that they had spread the news of Don's presence and who he was. Don knew many of the men; many were strangers. Burdick employed between twenty and thirty hands. Some were merely cowpokes working for their wages, but others were gunhawks with the brand of their calling on them, leathery-faced killers who would have shot Don casually.

A tall, lithe, Indian-straight man with black hair over a fierce, dark face, rode into the yard with two others. As he alighted, Don saw Shorty

walk over and speak to him. The big fellow looked toward Don and promptly strode across to him. He climbed the stairs and stood beside Don; the other two waited below.

The tall man said, "Howdy. You're Don Russell, ain't you?"

Don smiled easily. "Mrs. Russell's oldest son."

"My name's Jones—I'm foreman here. Was there something you wanted?"

"I'm waiting for Tom Burdick."

Jones' gaze rested significantly on Don's low-slung holsters, with their brown butts protruding. He said, "The rule here is when you come callin' on the boss, you leave your hardware with me—'specially when it's known you're no friend of his."

Through eyes as cold and bleak as a gray norther, Don gazed up at him. But, fingering his holsters, he said not a word more.

Abruptly Mrs. Shaw's voice broke in on them from the door. She said, "Like a cup of coffee while you're waiting, Mr. Russell?" Her gaze swung to Jones and she added blandly, "Mr. Russell's here to see Tom about something important."

Don rose. He passed the foreman with an even, unhurried stride. Mrs. Shaw opened the door and followed him in.

She said, when they reached the dining-room, "I saw Tom come over that brook below and ride into the cottonwoods twenty minutes ago. He should've been here by now—why ain't he? Maybe someone told him you're here waiting for him—maybe he's waiting for you to go back the way you came."

In the silence that followed, with Don's gaze probing her, she added quietly, "I'm Fred Clarke's aunt—only Tom Burdick don't know that. I got no reason to wish him well."

Then Don understood. Fred Clarke had been a homesteader who had squatted on Government range which Burdick regarded as his own. He had been warned to leave, had refused, and one morning had been found dead, literally riddled by bullets.

"Trouble is, Frank Jones out there won't let you leave now," went on Mrs. Shaw, her face furrowed. "He knows—they all know—you're no friend of Tom's. They'll keep you here till he comes. I don't know why he didn't ride in—he can't be afraid of you—with all his men around."

I know the reason, thought Don. After all, Burdick was a justice of the peace—he didn't want a killing in which he had a part. There had already been some in which he was suspected to have had a share. And it was probably becoming common knowledge that he did business with Thirty-eight and had done business with Red Welch. On the other hand, if a man riding through the woods was found with a bullet in his back, a man with as many enemies as Don, who would dare accuse Burdick? Much more likely to be Thirty-eight or one of his owlhooters.

And thinking of Thirty-eight, Don wondered where he could be? Why hadn't he and Long Lou returned to report to Burdick or Sheriff Wyrick? Or had he done so and gone out looking for Don? Don smiled,

thinking that where he now was would be the last place Thirty-eight would go searching.

"I'll go upstairs and get the sheriff," said Don. "If you would call those gents away for some reason . . ."

"I'll call 'em into the kitchen to have coffee and pie," said the woman. "They sure like my pie—and it's still warm."

As Don started up the stairs, she went out to the veranda.

Don turned the knob and entered Wyrick's room. He said, "Ready, Sheriff? We're going!"

Wyrick sat by the window, his thin face dark and weary. He rose slowly. Don handed him his gun without a word.

When they got out on the porch, only Jones was there. He sat tilted back in a chair. When he saw them he let the chair come down and rose. His hand touched the butt of his gun.

Wyrick said to him, "Tell Tom we're havin' a meeting of ranchers over at Russell's place. I'll be there waitin' for him."

His craggy brows bent, his lips thin, the tall man frowned at them. As the sheriff walked off to get his buckboard, Jones resumed his seat. Standing loose and at ease, Don could feel the foreman's eyes boring into him.

The sheriff came back in his rig. Don mounted his horse and the two rode across the clearing.

A pair of wolfish eyes watched them from the woods. Then Thirty-eight went back to where Burdick sat smoking behind a tree. He spoke to him and both men melted swiftly into the half-gloom beyond. They found Lonergan there, his hands and feet tied together.

Burdick's pale blue eyes chilled the cowpuncher. He said, "Your pal is about to die resisting arrest for murder. Something could happen to you for trying to help him, Jim—we'll have to see about that."

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS COOL and dark in the woods and Don, riding behind the buckboard, gazed about him warily, fully aware that his life depended on the sharpness of his senses. Somewhere hereabouts Burdick was lying in ambush. He looked about for the stocking-foot sorrel of which Burdick was so proud.

It was almost blue dusk among the trees on both sides of the trail. The clouds above had thickened and shut out the sun, so that the cottonwoods loomed like white ghosts. Eyes and senses strained to the utmost, Don's swift glances raked the murky thickets. He himself looked like a wolf lean with hunger and ready to spring and kill.

The idea came to him suddenly. It came when he saw the horse.

He said to Wyrick, in a low voice, "I've trusted you, Sheriff—I take it you're anxious to keep on living."

Wyrick stared back at him in a puzzled fashion. "What's eatin' you now, Don?"

"Over to your right—don't look—is a stocking-foot sorrel staked out

in a clump of hackberries. There's a damned sneaking, bloodthirsty bushwhacker waiting till we get near him so he won't miss me—and you too, maybe—because you might be a witness against him. Safer for him if you're dead."

It never occurred to Don just then that Thirty-eight might also be in the vicinity; he was thinking only of Burdick.

Wyrick gnawed at the cheroot he had lighted and scowled thoughtfully.

His features dark and hard-bitten, his grey eyes chilly, Don watched the law-officer and tried to read his expression.

He said, "You're an old man—you haven't so much longer to live, Wyrick. You were once known to be a square-shooter and folks respected you. Question is are you going out as a square-shooter or as a sneaking traitor, afraid of a snake like Burdick and doing his dirty work for him?"

The wind whispered in from the west, and a woodpecker tapped monotonously. A tired smile spread over Wyrick's furrowed visage.

He said quietly, "What is it you want, Don?"

"Pull your gun," Don told him, "and shoot at me twice—but miss. We'll have a ruction first."

Wyrick took a long puff at his stogy, then threw it away. He shouted angrily, "And I'm tellin' you I'm sheriff of this county and that you're under arrest, Don Russell! Now git in front of me where I can be sure you won't plug me in the back!"

"Why, you durned old billy-goat!" Don's voice was harsh and clear; it held a note of jeering. "If that was in my mind I'd have done it long ago—I can do it even now. That'll be enough of this horse-opera—get going before I get mad!"

"All right then, you asked for it!" With a hoarse oath, Wyrick drew his gun.

Really, thought Don, the old geezer was a born actor. Queer though, if he was really in earnest. Don would never know it.

Don slapped down for his own .45 as the sheriff drew his. Then things happened fast.

The sheriff's gun hammer rocked twice under his thumb, and as the gun roared, Don clapped both hands to his face and fell off his horse.

Holding the smoking weapon in his hand, his eyes on the motionless figure beside the still horse, Wyrick started to get out of the wagon.

Through the brush two figures came on the run, Burdick and Thirty-eight. Thirty-eight was behind Burdick, as usual.

Burdick called, "Did you get him, Ted?"

Wyrick drawled, "I reckon."

"Let him have a couple more, just to make sure," said Burdick. He stepped forward, his gun ready.

Abruptly the figure on the ground rose like a coiled spring. Pointing his gun under the horse's belly he ordered, "Drop your gun, Burdick!"

And then he saw Thirty-eight!

(Bill Boyd in Paramount's "Stick to Your Guns.")

Don threw himself against a nearby rock and fired coolly.

Like a flash both men flattened to the ground, Thirty-eight behind Burdick. There was a flurry of gunshots, a bullet smacked into the horse's front leg and another thudded into its side.

Burdick had dropped his weapon; he stood there transfixed.

"Get out of the way," yelled Don.

The horse staggered a few feet and dropped, just as Burdick dived to one side and sprawled on the ground.

And now Don and Thirty-eight, both prone on the ground, confronted each other with nothing between them.

Watching them, a grim smile spread over the sheriff's seamed face and the thought flashed through his mind, "That ain't the way the Injun likes it."

Thirty-eight, his yellow eyes blazing, flicked his wrist upward and jerked to one side even as he pulled the trigger. At the same instant Don threw himself against a nearby rock and fired coolly. The roar of the half-breed's gun came a split second behind the smash of Don's .45.

Thirty-eight's face disappeared in a red smear as Don's slug took him between the eyes.

Lonergan's loud yell for help sounded, but Wyrick's gaze never shifted from Burdick. He said, "Don't reach for that, Tom, or I'll have to plug you," and Burdick withdrew the hand that had been pushing toward the gun he had dropped.

THE BUCKBOARD with Sheriff Wyrick driving and Burdick sitting sullenly beside him entered the T-Square yard. Behind the wagon rode Don and Lonergan, the latter with a handkerchief about his head.

Her eyes starry, Ruth ran to meet Don as he dismounted. There were at least fifty ranchers and cowboys about the place—on the porch, inside the ranchhouse, in the yard.

"Is Gene all right?" was Don's first question.

"He's all right—he feels better. The doctor thinks he's getting along fine." She pressed his arm with warm fingers and whispered with throaty softness, "I was terribly worried, Don. What happened?"

"It's a long story." He stepped forward and shook hands cordially with Randy Franklin and several others.

Franklin murmured, glancing toward the buckboard, "I'd never have believed it. How did you do it, Don?"

"There's still Thirty-eight," muttered a rancher.

Don said briefly, "He's dead. Let's start our meeting."

It was a short session. Burdick resigned as justice of the peace; Wyrick resigned as sheriff.

Don was on his feet. He said, "There's still the question of payment for the stock stolen from this ranch—as you see, it was pretty thoroughly cleaned out." His eyes rested on Burdick.

"Don't blame me for that," Burdick protested. He looked like a cornered rat—shifty-eyed, meeting no man's eyes.

"No?" Don stared at him steadily. He called, "Come over here, Lonergan."

As the cowpuncher began pushing through, Burdick said hastily, "All right, all right, I don't want any more trouble—you're holding the winning hand, Russell. What do you want?"

A rancher growled, "If it wasn't for Don, you'd stretch hemp from the limb of a cottonwood, Burdick. Jest remember you're on probation—jest remember that. And get rid of them gunhawks you got ridin' for you or we'll string 'em up!"

"That bunkhouse would cost about a thousand dollars to replace," Don went on relentlessly. "And there's the stock! Of course, if you'd rather have this case tried out before the new justice of the peace and a jury, Burdick . . ."

"We'll make you sheriff and you keep him in the calaboose until it's tried," suggested Wally Kearns, winking at Don. "If I was on the jury, I'd say fifty thousand would about cover the damages done to you, Don."

"I'll pay twenty, cash, and call it a settlement," Burdick offered. "I'll throw in the mortgage for five thousand."

IT WAS all over and the ranchers and their followers had departed. Don sat on the veranda, with Ruth beside him. Her throat was bare, her neck and arms firmly rounded, and there was a proud, soft look in her eyes as they met Don's. The last light of day was colorfully departing, and the wind that came down from the hills was mild and pleasant.

They rose and walked out toward the distant horizon and stood gazing into the eternal, ever-changing mystery of the west. Ruth leaned toward Don, and he put his arm about her, relaxed and content.

It had been a desperate gamble and the stakes high, but Don had won.

(Continued From Page 45)

ROAD BRANDING

When referring to the long cattle drives of the old West, what was meant by the term "road branding"?

"Road branding" meant giving the cattle to be taken on the drive a common brand. This was necessary, as the cattle probably had been gathered from a number of different owners, having different brands. The road brand, which was usually not burned as deeply as the regular mark, served to identify any cattle belonging to a certain herd traveling the trail.

RUNNING IRON

What is a "running iron"?

A running iron is, generally speaking, a hooked piece of metal. With it a brand is traced on the animal, as one would use a pencil. For this reason, any number of brands can be made with this type of iron. In some localities, possession of a running iron was prohibited by law—because it made the altering of legitimate brands too easy for the cattle rustler.

WESTERN HOSPITALITY

It was at one time customary in the Old West for all doors of the ranch house to be left unlocked—for the welcome mat to be out for any stranger—even though the house itself were entirely unattended. Why did this custom originate?

The custom of leaving the ranch house doors unlocked so that any stranger might walk in at will, probably originated as a safety measure. In the old days, ranches were few and far apart, and a wandering man couldn't always plan his stopping places ahead. It was only at a ranch house that many of the things necessary to life were obtainable. Hence, a starving man could not be allowed to find the doors locked before him! Another reason was that strangers often brought news which served to relieve the loneliness of life on the cattle range.

INDIAN RIDERS

The life of a cowboy sometimes depended on his keen eyesight. Not infrequently he would have to determine whether or not a rider, a long distance away, was another white man, or an Indian. If the rider were an Indian, what position would he generally assume on the horse?

Usually an Indian, when riding a horse, would assume a slouched bent-over position. His head would be somewhat forward, and his shoulders hunched. A closer look would show that his feet were turned outward—his heels digging constantly in the side of the horse.

Tom made a lightning draw and fired at a spot close to Buckhorn's feet.

The Drifting Kid

Fictionized by D. L. Sandler from the Monogram Picture starring

TOM KEENE

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Jim Vernon	Tom Keene
Tom Sterling	Tom Keene
Betty Lane	Betty Miles
Slim Chance	Slim Andrews
Lopez Mendoza	Frank Yacconelli
Jeff Payson	Glenn Strange
Roger Lane	Steve Clark
Rex Jenkins	Stanley Price
Ace Reed	Louis Yacconelli
Blackie Thompson	Gene Alsace
Buckhorn	James Sherridan
Sheriff Parker	Fred Hoose

A RIFLE barked, splitting the silence of the hot afternoon. The bullet streaked down from the rocky slope, biting into the ground and kicking up a swirl of dust in front of the three horsemen. They were young Jim Vernon, owner of Wild Horse Valley; Jeff Payson, his ranch manager, and Roger Lane, his foreman.

Startled, the three men looked up. Payson and Lane raised their rifles and fired at moving figures above. Both sides cut loose in echoing volleys.

Up among the rocks, Ace Reed, Blackie Thompson, Buckhorn and the rest of the Jenkins gang edged downward. "We've got to get 'em," heavy-set Ace snapped. "Got to—this is our chance!"

Down below the three riders had sized up the situation. Payson said, "We're outnumbered! Best thing is to make a run for it!"

Lane agreed. "Let's head for town!"

Jim Vernon was the most nervous of the three. He muttered, "We'll have to get the law—it's me they're after!"

Their enemies among the rocks saw the quarry galloping away. Ace yelled, "After 'em—we've got to get 'em before they reach town!

But before they could scramble down the rocky slope to the trail, the three men were fast-moving specks in the distance. The only comfort the attackers had was that their intended victims could not have had a good look at them.

"What do we do now?" swarthy little Blackie asked Ace.

Ace always had a plan. "We'll split up," he said quickly. "Drift quietly into town, and meet in Jenkins' office."

There was no other course open to them. This was the second time they had failed to get the owner of Wild Horse Valley, but there would be other chances.

Safely back in town that night, Jim Vernon and his two companions were disappointed to find that the Sheriff was away on business and would not return for three days. "Disappointed" hardly described Jim Vernon's state of mind. As he sat at a corner table in Ah Ling's Chinese Restaurant with Payson and Lane, he was definitely jittery.

"What'll we do?" he mumbled over and over. "They were after me! I don't want to get shot without a chance." He looked at his friends appealingly.

Payson remained thoughtful for a few moments. Then he spoke: "There's only one thing to do, Jim. You've got to hide out—right here in town. Get a room at the Palace Hotel. You know Mrs. Murphy can be trusted."

Lane looked doubtful. "Hiding him won't solve who's trying to kill him and why."

"It'll keep him alive until the Sheriff gets back. In the meantime, we may get some ideas."

An idea came before any of them expected it. It walked right into Ah Ling's at that very moment in the person of bronzed, swaggering, carefree Tom Sterling, shadowed as usual by his jolly little Mexican satellite, Lopez. There was a reason for the open-mouthed astonishment when Tom Sterling and Jim Vernon caught sight of each other. They looked enough alike to be twin brothers.

Little Lopez pinched himself on the cheek to make sure he was awake. Could the long ride up from Mexico with Tom have gone to his head? "What ees thees? Tom, are you here or are you there?"

Payson was the first to grasp the situation and realize its possibilities. After Tom Sterling and Lopez had sat down, he walked over to them.

"Howdy!" he greeted.

Tom looked up at him. "Hello!"

"New in town, aren't you?"

"Mebbe so!" His glance swung across toward Vernon. "Reckon I ain't the only one of my family."

Payson smiled and went to the point. "I don't think he's related to you. I came over to ask whether you'd be interested in a job?"

Tom leaned back in his chair. "Always interested in a job at the right price."

"Even if the job is a little dangerous?"

"Then I'm sure" — Tom raised quizzical eyebrows—"the price will be right!"

"Come over and meet my friends," Payson invited. "Let's talk it over."

When Tom came over with Lopez and was duly introduced, Jim Vernon shook his head wonderingly. "I can't get over how much alike we look," he marveled.

Tom grinned. "Maybe that ain't so lucky for you. Well—let's get down to business. What's this job?"

It didn't take long to explain that Jim Vernon owned Wild Horse Valley and had a contract to supply the Mexican government with cavalry mounts. He had come West from Maine six months ago, and everything had gone smoothly until, about a fortnight before, he had delivered two hundred head of horses under

his contract, and they had been stolen shortly after delivery.

Unseen by the others, Tom winked at Lopez, while his face remained expressionless. Jim Vernon and his employes would have been surprised to learn that the Mexican government had hired Tom Sterling to track down the stolen horses.

"I heard about it," Tom drawled. "Seems you got your dinero, all right—it was the Mexicans who lost out. Three of their men killed, too. You didn't lose anything, did you?"

Vernon flushed resentfully. "That's where you're wrong, Sterling. I stand to lose my contract with the Mexican government. And I also intend to make good the loss to them."

"Not to mention," Lane put in, "that twice they've tried to kill him, and it's my hunch it was the same bunch stole the cayuses."

Payson cleared his throat. "After seeing how closely you resemble Jim," he began, "it was my idea that maybe—"

"I know," Tom interrupted. "It's your idea I'd be him, ain't it? And they're trying to kill him! Nothing doing!"

"But if we make the price right?" Payson argued.

"*Senor* Tom," Lopez whispered, "what is death if the price is right . . . No?"

"No!" Tom said.

Payson leaned a little closer to him. "Give this a thought," he urged. "If you won't pose as Mr. Vernon, you'd better leave town, because they'll think you're him anyway."

There was a long moment of silence, and then Tom shrugged his shoulders good-naturedly. "You got me!" he said. "If I'm in danger anyhow, I might as well get paid for it."

It didn't take long for Tom to change clothes with Jim Vernon in a room above the restaurant. Then Vernon left to take refuge at the Palace Hotel.

"You could fool even hees mother," Lopez told Tom.

Someone else, looking in through the window and seeing Tom dressed as Jim Vernon, must have agreed with Lopez. It was Buckhorn, one of the gang that had tried to get Jim earlier in the day. A bullet whizzed into the restaurant and Tom's hat flew off. He and Lopez drew their guns and raced to the window, but Buckhorn was gone.

Tom went slowly back to Payson. "Never mind the price," he said grimly. "I'll take the job—for nothing—and you can pay what you think is right to Lopez."

THAT SAME NIGHT, suave, crafty Rex Jenkins, the brains of the crooked outfit, shook his head disappointedly as he sat in his real estate office on the main street of the town. "I'm sorry you missed getting Vernon today," he said to Ace and Blackie. "It delays things. I hear he's aiming to give the Mexicans two hundred head of horses to replace the ones that were stolen—he wants to hold his contract."

Blackie and Ace knew what Jenkins was thinking. If Jim Vernon didn't make good, he'd lose the contract. With Jim out of the way, his folks back East would sell Wild Horse Valley for a song. Then Jenkins could move right in and buy it.

But it wasn't so simple, now that they had to deal with Tom Sterling. Jenkins and Ace looked puzzled the next morning when they watched "Jim" tightening the cinch on his horse at the hitching rack on the main street.

"Say," Ace muttered, "you told me

he never packed a gun! What's that in his holster, a powder puff?"

Jenkins shook his head. "I've never seen a gun on him before. I wonder what's come over him."

Ace drew his shooting-iron impetuously, but Jenkins stopped him. "Not here!" he chided. "Show a little savvy!"

Their attention was diverted by the sound of a mouth organ. A salesman named Slim Chance was playing as he walked down the street, swaggering in a tight-fitting checked suit, derby, and patent leather shoes.

When he reached the entrance of Jenkins' store, Buckhorn stopped him. "You play pretty good, Mister. How's your dancin'?"

Slim smiled affably. "Not so good. My dogs have been barkin' for the last ten miles."

Buckhorn sneered, "Well now, that's jest too bad! My friends and me want to see a little buck-and-wing — right now — and make it fancy." He drew his gun and fired into the ground close to Slim's feet.

Slim, panic-stricken, made a feeble effort to dance, quickening his steps as Buckhorn kept shooting.

"Faster, faster!" Buckhorn yelled. and his cohorts laughed and shouted derisive encouragement.

Down the street, Tom, mounted on his intelligent horse, Rusty, and still trying to get used to the name "Jim," was about to ride off with Lopez and Payson. Hearing the shots from Buckhorn's gun, he turned, squinted, and sized up the cruel joke. He dismounted and strode over to the scene.

"Hold it a minute," he rasped. The weary Slim paused, gasping for breath. "Nice dance," Tom drawled, looking at Buckhorn, "but don't you think he's a little tired?"

Buckhorn pretended to deliberate. "Sure. We'll give him a rest. It's your turn."

Tom made a lightning draw and fired at a spot close to Buckhorn's feet. "After you," he said coolly. Buckhorn and the gang stared at him in wide-eyed surprise. He fired again. "Let's have it!" He glanced at Slim: "A little music, friend."

Buckhorn started to dance, urged on by Tom's intermittent shots. Ace came out of Jenkins' store and saw what was going on. He stepped behind Tom, and jammed his .38 into his back. "Put that cutter away," he snarled.

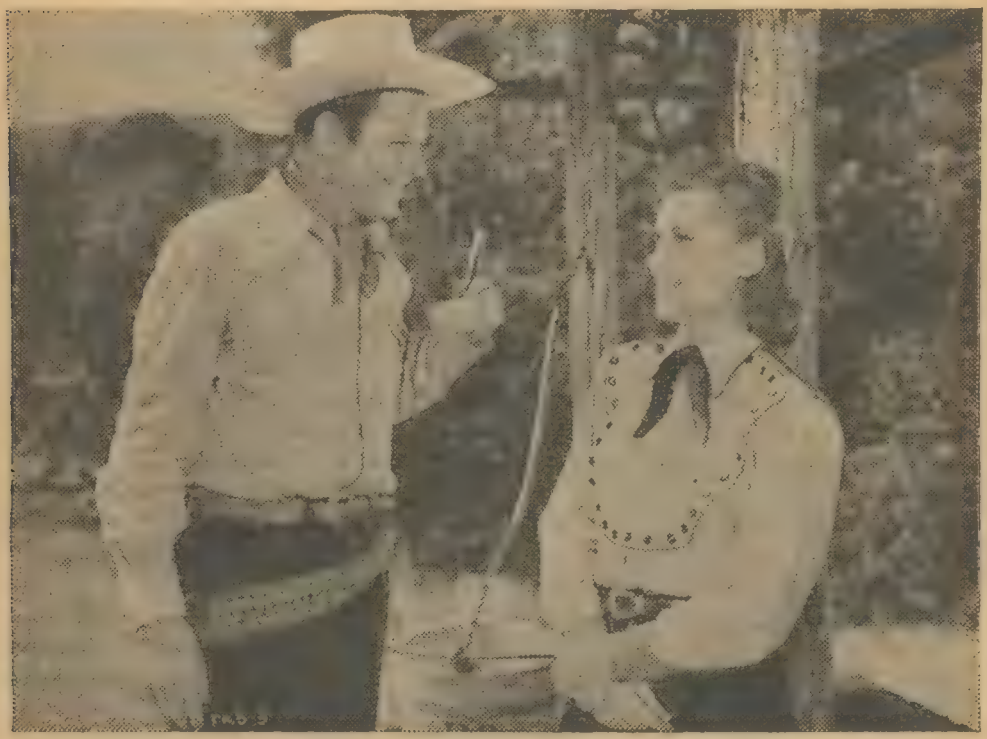
All eyes were riveted tensely on the scene as Tom slowly restored his gun to his holster. Like a flash he ducked and wheeled around, knocking Ace's gun spinning with one hand, and swinging a hard left to Ace's jaw. Both men went to it then, swinging and jabbing, neither giving ground.

Jenkins, watching with keen eyes, nudged Blackie. Blackie drew and sidled toward the fighting men—only to feel cold steel pressing into the back of his neck. It was Lopez, smiling and holding out his hand for Blackie's weapon. Blackie obliged grumpily, and Lopez emptied and returned the gun with an elegant bow.

Just about then, Tom's solid smash landed on the point of Ace's jaw. It knocked Ace into the water-trough, out cold.

When Ace came to, some time later, he sat up and rubbed his jaw ruefully. He snarled at the others, "Who was it said he was yellow? You must be color-blind."

TOM was taking a drink of water at Jim Vernon's ranch when Betty Lane rode up, dismounted from her horse at the hitching-rack, and came over. She said, "Hello,



Betty Lane dismounted from her horse and came over. Tom smiled before he knew what it was all about.

Jim," and Tom looked up and smiled. Before he knew what it was all about, a dark and very attractive young woman had thrown her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"Well, aren't you going to kiss me?" she scolded.

This was something Tom hadn't bargained for. Stammering and flustered, he backed away. "Yes—er—sure—just a minute!" Then he turned and fled precipitately, leaving the girl staring after him. Tom had never been as handy with the women as he was with his six-shooter.

Tom almost collided with Roger Lane, who had apparently been watching with great amusement. "Who's that?" demanded Tom in an undertone.

"That," said Lane gently, "happens to be my daughter. She's Jim's sweetheart."

"Well, I don't aim to doublecross Jim. Tell her I'm sick or something—I'll try and keep out of sight. Lopez and I are taking a ride out to the hills 'long about the spot where they shot at you."

Lane nodded. "Good luck! I'll tell Betty you aren't feeling well."

AS THEY rode along, Tom mused aloud: "Reckon the gents who stole that two hundred head from your government, Lopez, are also the ones who're trying to kill Jim Vernon. Seems clear enough they want his contract. First they tried to put him in bad, and now they're trying to kill him!"

With this thought to mull over, he

and the Mexican parted, after arranging to meet again later. "But, *Senor,*" called Lopez, "what am I to look for, horses or men?"

"Both," Tom replied, and rode off. For almost three hours he cantered up and down trails, constantly climbing, however, until he got to the edge of a cliff overlooking a river. Here he dismounted to rest and look about.

The crash of a shot came as a shock. He spun about and saw three horsemen galloping toward him. Instantly he realized he was trapped. He dove headlong into the water below.

When they rode up to the spot, Ace, Blackie and Buckhorn saw Tom's hat floating on the swirling waters.

"That's got him," Ace grunted. "Now we can go back and collect from Jenkins."

They were turning when Buckhorn yipped, "Hey, look!"

Far below they saw Tom swimming downstream. Figuring that he couldn't get out of the gorge, the three clattered down to intercept him at the rapids.

In the meantime, Tom swam to a rock, looked up the side of the cliff and whistled shrilly. Rusty's ears went up alertly and he trotted to the edge and looked down.

Tom commanded urgently, "Give me that rope, boy! The rope! Throw it down—the rope!" It was a stunt they had practiced over and over, for just such a contingency.

The intelligent animal twisted his head, took the loose lariat from the saddle with his teeth, and let it fall down over the cliff, one end remaining fastened to the pummel of the saddle. Tom caught the free end and fashioned a foot-loop. He called to Rusty, "Now back up—back!" Obediently Rusty moved back, and up came Tom on the rope. On terra firma once more, Tom mounted, wheeled and rode off.

At the foot of the cliff, Ace, Blackie and Buckhorn had watched with amazement. "I give up on that bird," Ace snarled. "He's got a charmed life. We'll go back and tell Jenkins; maybe he can handle him."

AT THE RANCH that evening, Tom did his best to avoid Betty Lane, but after supper she caught him in the yard. She said severely, "You're not fooling me!"

Tom shrugged and remained silent.

"I know you're not Jim Vernon. Who are you? What's happened to Jim?"

"He's safe," Tom said. "That's why I'm here . . . keeping him safe. I can't tell you any more—please ask your father."

And he went off to the corral, leaving Betty to question Lane.

As Tom approached Rusty, he caught a glimpse of a figure behind a clump of brush. From behind a cottonwood he stood watching, and saw the figure ride away. He mounted and followed at a distance, and together pursuer and pursued galloped through the black hills. Tom skirted the trail and did his best to keep out of sight.

Finally, the figure reined up at a little shack, dismounted, and went in. It was Blackie, and Buckhorn was inside waiting for him.

"Have any luck?" Buckhorn asked.

"No, there was too many there to take a chance. But I sure learned something Jenkins will be glad to hear. I'm ridin' in to tell him in the morning."

The door flew open and Tom strode in, gun in hand, seeing only Blackie.

Tom said ominously, "You're the bird who took a shot at me today!

Who else was with you? Let's have it. Who's bossing your gang?"

Before Blackie could reply, Tom sensed someone moving behind him and spun around to cover Buckhorn who was reaching for a gun on the wall. Seeing his chance, Blackie dove at Tom, pinning his arms and forcing him to drop his gun. Buckhorn jumped in and Tom backed off with flailing fists. He broke away from Blackie, smashed Buckhorn down, then turned to meet Blackie again. A terrific swing sent Blackie tumbling into one of the bunks. Buckhorn, gathering strength from rage and desperation, fought Tom all over the shack in a whirlwind attack that practically wrecked the place. But he was no match for Tom, who waited coolly until the attack slowed down. Then a feint to the stomach lowered Buckhorn's guard, and Tom's right reached the button. It was curtains for Mr. Buckhorn.

After helping himself to a drink from a bucket, Tom poured the rest over the unconscious men. "Come on," he ordered when they sat up. "You two skunks are going to the hoosegow!"

JENKINS was not particularly disturbed when he heard that his two henchmen were in jail. His lawyer could get them out without any difficulty. Right now he was busy with a plan to fix Jim Vernon once and for all. He was going to let the law handle it after he had planted some of the stolen horses on Jim's range.

Inside the jail, Tom grilled Blackie and Buckhorn all night long—without result. They became particularly tense and reticent whenever he asked them about the stolen horses.

Tom told Lopez about it the next day. "Think these are the *ladrones*

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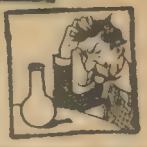

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No. 246, metal frame, each 10c
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Mind Reading Deck
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A spectator who has never seen this effect will name any number of cards drawn and replaced in deck. each $2.00

Joy Buzzer
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A hand-shaker which produces a buzzing vibration when shaking hands. Carded or boxed. each 25c

Magic Coin Box
(No. 1446)

In 3 seconds you can produce a marked coin in a SEALED bag inside a SEALED match box and a SEALED wood box. each 35c

Jumping Flea
(No. 334)

A round metal disc resembling a coin. When laid on a flat surface it jumps into the air. Each on card. each 15c

who rustled the horses?" asked the Mexican.

"Sure do!" Tom nodded absently. "But it's their boss I'm after, and the only way we can get him is to keep sticking our necks out."

Lopez drew his fingers significantly across his throat. "And get thees?"

Tom laughed. They had been riding toward the hills. "Wait for me at the ranch," he directed, wheeling his horse. "I'll see you soon."

A little later he heard a girl's voice calling him, and looked up to see Betty Lane riding down a ridge towards him. "Dad told me you were in the hills," she said, "so I rode out to find you. Let's sit down somewhere."

They dismounted and sat down on a fallen log.

Betty said soberly, "You're a very brave man, fighting another man's battles."

"I'm being paid for it," Tom said indifferently.

"It takes courage just the same."

They looked at each other steadily and then Betty looked down. "I wish Jim had some of your courage," she murmured. "Dad told me where he's hiding. I wonder if he's all right."

"Sure he's all right," Tom assured her. "But you better stay away from there."

They sat in companionable silence until suddenly Rusty whinnied. Tom and Betty rose and looked about. Down below them they saw a herd of mustangs grazing.

"That's a nice-looking bunch of horses," Tom remarked.

Betty didn't answer. She was staring fixedly.

"What's the matter?" Tom asked.

"Those are the horses Jim sold to the Mexican government! I suppose you know that property is Hidden Valley. It belongs to a man named Rex Jenkins."

"Let's ride in and get your father," Tom proposed quickly.

They mounted and raced toward the Vernon ranch. Lane, Payson and Lopez were sitting on the veranda when they arrived.

Tom shouted, "Get your horses! We've found the stolen herd!"

No time was lost, yet when they came back to Hidden Valley, the herd of stolen horses had disappeared. Ace and his gang had seized the opportunity to drive the herd onto Vernon's property. When they got back to the ranch, Tom and his companions were met by Sheriff Parker and his deputies. Jenkins and Ace were there, too.

"There they are," Jenkins said as the puzzled riders drew up. He was pointing toward the corral. "Every one of them is carrying the Mexican brand."

There were about ten of the stolen mustangs in the corral.

"Looks right bad for you, son," remarked Parker coldly. "Jim Vernon, I'm placing you under arrest."

"What for?" demanded Payson superfluously.

"Stealin' hosses!"

"And there's the evidence right before your eyes," Jenkins accused brazenly. "The rest of the stolen herd we saw in your north meadow."

"Reckon I'll have to take you too, Payson—and Lane," the Sheriff remarked.

Tom muttered out of the side of his mouth, to Payson and Lane, "Frame-up! Get ready to hightail it!" Aloud he said, "There must be some mistake. Let's dismount and talk this thing over."

The group started to dismount. But Tom, Payson and Lane jerked their animals about and were off in

a cloud of dust. An instant later the Sheriff and his deputies had remounted and dashed in pursuit.

Betty's lovely young face held despair. "I'm going after the real Jim Vernon," she announced to Lopez. "He's the only one can straighten this thing out now." She got on her horse and galloped off. Lopez spurred after her.

Ace murmured to Jenkins, "She's headin' for town!" Quietly the two men started in the same direction.

Evading their pursuers without much difficulty, Tom, Payson and Lane hid out in the woods.

IN TOWN, several important things were taking place. Betty Lane was telling the fearful Jim Vernon in his hotel room that Tom Sterling would be hung for horse-stealing unless he interfered.

Partially hidden in the alley alongside the Cattlemen's Palace, Lopez had obtained a commanding view of the street. He saw Ace and Jenkins enter the latter's office. A little later Blackie and Buckhorn came along and went inside. Lopez crept to the window of the real estate office and listened.

"We had something to tell you," Blackie grumbled, "but you took your time getting us out of the jug."

"Talk up!" Ace snapped. "What is it?"

"The bird you think is Jim Vernon is a phony!"

"We was over the border," Buckhorn added. "We found out that him and the Mexican are special officers searching for the horses we rustled!"

A long silence ensued, while Jenkins paced back and forth, deep in thought over this new development. "We're in the clear on those horses now," he said at last, "but we gotta get rid of the real Vernon while the

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evidence is still here against him. I wonder where he is."

"That gal knows!" Ace suggested promptly.

Jenkins nodded. "You're right, Ace! Go out and find her and make her tell you where he's hiding."

Lopez had heard enough. He rushed to the hotel, arriving just in time to intercept Vernon and Betty as they were about to leave, Betty having finally persuaded Jim to come out and obtain Tom's release.

"You got to stay here," Lopez told them excitedly. "They will keel you, *Senor* Vernon! Come look!" He took them to the window. Ace and his pals were walking down the street, eying Betty's horse with obvious interest.

"We must find *Senor* Tom," said Lopez.

Betty's jaw set determinedly. "I'll find him. Lopez, you stay here with Mr. Vernon."

"But they are hideeng somewhere in the hills," Lopez objected.

"Yes, but I know where Dad would hide them out."

Vernon looked gloomy and anxious. "Suppose they get after you, Betty?"

"I've got to take that chance!" Betty ran out of the room. Downstairs, she realized that her approach to her own horse was blocked by Blackie, Ace and the others. Seeing a team hitched to a buckboard not far from the hotel, she ran to it, jumped on the seat and started off at a rattling pace.

Jenkins, told of her flight, lost no time in sending Blackie and Buckhorn after her. It was a wild chase, during which a rear wheel of the buckboard came off, and Betty first rode on the shaft, then finally released one of the horses, and rode bareback, jumping a long rail fence in a daring effort.

They never got near her again. Betty kept on until she found her father with Tom and Payson. "If you want to save Jim Vernon," she panted, "come on!" The three men were quickly on their horses and racing with her toward town.

ACE REED had made a thorough search for Jim and reported his lack of success to Jenkins. "We've searched every spot in town but the Palace Hotel. Mrs. Murphy won't let us in there."

"She won't, eh?" Jenkins gritted. "Come on!"

Up in the hotel room, Jim was looking out of the window anxiously, while Slim Chance, the travelling salesman who had been rescued a few days before by Tom, was trying to give Lopez a sales talk. He wanted to sell his supply of firecrackers to the Mexican government. "I'll give you half of my profits," he promised.

"I like eet very much," Lopez said distractedly, "but right now I have sometheeng very much more important."

Slim persisted, "Let me demonstrate these firecrackers!"

Lopez joined Jim at the window in time to see Jenkins' gang approaching the hotel. "They are coming and we have no guns!" Lopez moaned.

It was then that Slim saw his chance to prove the merit of his merchandise. He lit a giant firecracker and tossed it, sizzling, out of the window. The firecracker landed in front of the approaching men and exploded with a bang. They turned and ran.

"Slim!" Jim cried. "Get the rest of your firecrackers!"

Down in the street a very much bewildered Ace asked, "What was that?"

(Continued On Page 96)

FOOT ITCH
ATHLETE'S FOOT

WHY TAKE CHANCES?

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ, whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected part with H. F. every night until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer?

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

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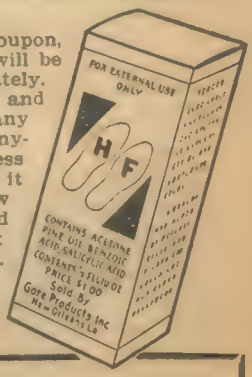
Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us $1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

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Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you $1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

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(Continued From Page 94)

"They're throwin' dynamite at us," growled Jenkins. "Come on—let's rush the door!"

Guns drawn, they started once more toward the hotel. Out from the window flew another giant firecracker; it exploded with even greater force than the first one. Once more the attackers jumped back. This time they took positions across the street and fired toward Jim's window.

The defenders worked fast, shooting the firecrackers out of the window, one after another. "I get the horses thees time," Lopez said, throwing one at the hitching rack. The explosion that ensued made the horses race away in a very great hurry. Now firecrackers were exploding all over the street and, in addition and for variety, Roman candles flew past the assailants in all directions, and they kept jumping and dodging them despite Jenkins' orders to rush the hotel.

This was the tableau that confronted Tom, Betty, Payson and Lane when they raced into town. Leaving Betty behind them, the three men dismounted and drew their guns. Jenkins saw them first and fired at them. Tom's first shot disposed of him permanently. Ace went down after a few futile shots, and the rest of the gang would have met the same fate if the Sheriff and his men hadn't ridden up.

Sullenly the rest of the gang surrendered. Jim came out of the hotel with Lopez and Slim; Betty ran down the street and joined them.

"Well, I guess that ends the job," Tom said coolly.

"Thanks to you," Jim added. He turned to Lopez and Slim. "If you two will come out to the ranch, I've got a couple of checks to write."

Slim grinned happily, while Lopez executed one of his elegant bows. *"Gracias, Senor!"* he said. "It will be a pleasure!"

NEXT DAY, out at Jim's ranch, Sheriff Parker shook hands with Tom. "Blackie and Buckhorn made a clean breast of it," he announced. "You were right — and thanks for the good work."

"That's all right, Sheriff," Tom said. "It looks like everything should be peaceful here from now on!"

He spoke too quickly, for suddenly there was a deafening explosion. The firecrackers Slim was trying to sell a Mexican official had gone off too soon.

"Come on," Tom called laughingly to Lopez. "Let's get out of here."

"Remember—you gents are always welcome in this town," the Sheriff said cordially.

Arm in arm, Betty and Jim stood on the veranda and waved a grateful goodbye as Tom and Lopez mounted their horses, turned off and rode away. Their job in Wild Horse Valley was finished.

THE BIG CATS

by Kathryn Rice

Thrilling circus love story in the next issue of

MOVIE LOVE

OUT NOVEMBER FIRST

Movie Western Says---

OUR fan mail is beginning to pile up these days. Everybody seems to like MOVIE WESTERN. Well, here goes for printing as many excerpts from those letters—and answering as many questions—as we can in this space.

M. Raney writes: *My friends and I have been waiting a long time for a book like this. . . . Could you please tell us where we could get pictures of Bob Livingston, and if we have to pay for them or not?*

That's a tough question, Margaret. Bob Livingston recently separated from Republic Pictures, his former company, and we haven't yet been informed of his future plans. Republic used to take care of his pictures for fans, but now . . .

The **Misses Pongratz** ask: *Could you possibly tell us if and when Bob Steele's life history is going to appear in your MOVIE ROUNDUP?*

The answer to "If" is yes. The answer to "When" is: In the near future—but we can't say exactly what issue.

J. Johnson urges: *Will you please have a picture of Tex "White Cloud" Ritter or one of Bob "Tucson Smith" Steele on the cover of the next issue?*

Not the next issue, because we have to go according to the greatest number of requests—but soon.

Corenne Aynardi thanks us for the cover picture of Gene Autry on our July issue (Corenne is a member of the Gene Autry Friendship Club) and asks: *Have you any spare pictures of Gene?*

Awfully sorry, Corenne. We don't have any. Why not write to Republic Pictures, Hollywood, Cal.?

K. Lingenfelter praises MOVIE WESTERN and adds: *I liked the editor's page, too.*

We blush and thank you gratefully.

E. Lingenfelter (a relative?) asks: *If possible, could we have a nice big picture and story of Johnny Mack Brown or Tom Mix's past stories?*

We'll try to include Johnny Mack Brown in an early issue, but Tom Mix's past stories don't seem available. We'll try to give you some biographical material on Tom, though.

E. Willett writes: *My pardner and I write a column for the Double R Bar Ranch News, club paper for the Roy Rogers Friendship Club, and we'll be only too glad to advertise your MOVIE WESTERN. Maybe you could do us a turn about and advertise our club. How about it?*

Well, there's your turn about. We advertised it.

Robert D. Smith opines: *I think your Movie Prospect-of-the-Month idea is grand. Yours for more issues of MOVIE WESTERN.*

Thanks. We've been getting a lot of praise for that idea.

L. Imber says: *I consider the stars of the past better than the present cowboy stars. Keep up the good work. Your magazine is swell.*

Wonder how many of our readers agree with that about the old-time stars versus the new.

D. Serpas sends such a complimentary letter that we don't dare print it; you'd think we wrote it ourselves.

There's a batch of other letters, too. They're all enthusiastic and encouraging, but we just haven't room for even one more.

Thanks, everybody.

THE EDITOR.

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED - THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH, MARY. EVERYTHING LOOKS SO HOPELESS
IT ISN'T HOPELESS, BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY RADIO. TOM GREEN IS DOING WELL. TALK TO HIM
BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT. RADIO'S STILL A YOUNG GROWING FIELD
TOM'S RIGHT. AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR GOOD PAY
U.S. MAIL

TRAINING AT HOME FOR RADIO IS PRACTICAL AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST
SOON I CAN START FIXING RADIOS
THERE'S NO END TO THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WELL TRAINED TECHNICIANS
OR WORK ON LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEMS
OR GET A JOB IN A BROADCASTING STATION
YOU SURE KNOW RADIO. MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER
THANKS! THAT'S $10 EXTRA I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME
OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO
I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME JOB NOW -- AND A BRIGHT FUTURE IN RADIO AND TELEVISION

I Trained These Men

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator. HOLLIS F. HAYES, 327 Madison St., Lapeer, Michigan.

Service Manager for Four Stores

I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N. R. I. I am now Radio Service Manager for the M—— Furniture Co. for their four stores. JAMES E. RYAN, 119 Pebble Court, Fall River, Mass.

$10 a Week Extra In Spare Time

I am doing spare time Radio work, and I am averaging around $500 a year. Those extra dollars mean so much—the difference between just barely getting by and living comfortably. JOHN WASHKO, 97 New Cranberry, Hazleton, Penna.

In U. S. Signal Corps

I am in the U. S. Army, Signal Corps, as Chief Radio Clerk. My duties also include maintenance of the transmitter and receivers when the Chief Radio Operator is absent. R. W. ANDERSON, Radio Station WTI, Vancouver Barracks, Washington.

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Here is a quick way to more pay. Radio offers the chance to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now. There is an increasing demand for full time Radio Technicians and Radio Operators, too. Many make $30, $40, $50 a week. On top of record business, the Radio industry is getting millions and millions of dollars in Defense Orders. Clip the coupon below and mail it. Find out how I train you for these opportunities.

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Over 800 broadcasting stations in the U. S. employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are over 50,000,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportunities to have their own service or retail Radio businesses. Think of the many good pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for those jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained. Many are getting special ratings in the Army and Navy; extra rank and pay.

Beginners Quickly Learn to Earn $5, $10 a Week Extra In Spare Time

Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable practical experience. You also get a modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

Find Out How I Train You For Good Pay in Radio

Mail the coupon below. I'll send my 64-page book FREE. It tells about my Course; the types of jobs in the different branches of Radio; shows letters from more than 100 of the men I trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postal.

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 1MX1, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

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Age.....

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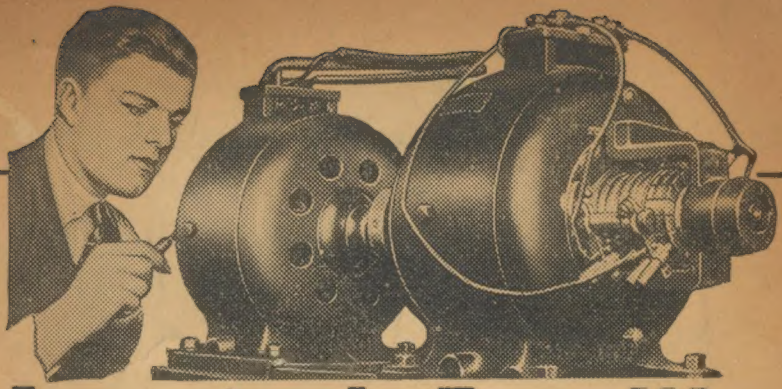

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...we help to make you a master electrician so you can cash in on the opportunities ahead.

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To get a good job today you've got to be trained. Industry demands men who have specialized training. These men will be the ones who are the big-pay men of the future. After graduation my Employment Department gives you Lifetime Employment Service. J. O. Whitmeyer says: "After I graduated, the School Employment Service furnished me with a list of several positions . . . I secured a position with an Electrical Construction Company ...aying me 3 to 4 times more ...week than I was getting ...fore I entered Coyne and ...ay I am still climbing ...higher pay."

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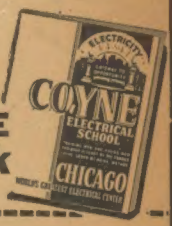
Get this FREE Book



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